



EMPLOYMENT EQUITY OFFICE



LANGUAGE EQUITY GUIDE: A GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

As well, avoid phrases that unnecessarily stress racial or ethnic features where such features would not be stressed for those of Anglo-European descent, e.g., 'two Arab students were accused of plagiarism.' Use inclusive terms that avoid assumptions of a norm when it does not exist. 'The stockings come in several shades of pink: rose, mauve, and pale pink.' [not flesh-coloured] (*Rainbow Associates*)

► Language and culture

Canada is a bilingual nation, with its two official languages being French & English. The great diversity of the Canadian population also includes people with many different ethnic, ancestral, religious and spiritual backgrounds. For example, awareness and sensitivity toward the linguistic diversity and the rich cultural diversity of the First Nations people in Canada is of particular importance.

Use of culturally inclusive language means representing all ethnic, cultural, and religious groups as equally valid. This means avoiding the use of a 'norm' with respect to language and culture, which has traditionally been Christian, Anglo-European, by which people from other backgrounds and religions are compared against and assessed.

In general, avoid referring to the ethnic, racial or religious background of a person or group unless there is a valid reason for doing so. If you need to specify a person's ethnicity, use a qualifying adjective such as 'Jewish Canadian', 'Canadian of Irish descent'. Alternatively, hyphenation can be used as in 'Italo-Canadian'. Show respect for the personal preference of people who choose to be or not be identified by their ethnic group. As well, inappropriate generalizations should not be made about ethnicity and religion. Not

everyone in an ethnic group necessarily has the same religion. For example, not all Lebanese or Turkish people are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabic or Turkish.

(*Working with Diversity*, Queensland's University of Technology)

► Language and disability

In addition to derogatory and offensive labeling, non-inclusive language in relation to people with a disability often focuses on the disability rather than the person, which positions them as one-dimensional objects of sympathy rather than a person with a full life. People with a disability often comment that they experience disadvantage because of the way in which society is structured, not because of their disability.

Using language inclusive of people with a disability should include:

1. Putting people first, not their disability. *Instead of using handicapped or disabled, you can say person with a disability.*
2. Acknowledging that individuals with disabilities may have different preferences regarding terminology. If possible, find out what the person with the disability prefers. *For example, some people with a visual disability may refer to themselves as 'blind' while others with a visual disability may prefer the term(s) person with low or limited loss of vision.*

► Contacts and further information

Employment Equity Office x2056
www.uwindsor.ca/equity

Human Rights Office x3400
www.uwindsor.ca/humanrights

► What is inclusive language?

Using inclusive language is sometimes referred to as non-discriminatory language. Essentially it means that we should use language that does not demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, or trivialize people on the basis of their membership in a certain group or because of a particular attribute such as gender, race, disability or other aspect.

Using inclusive language does not mean having to use terms that are difficult, or grammatically incorrect, rather it means avoiding terminology that may be offensive, and selecting other suitable terms.

Using inclusive language recognizes that all people are valued participants in our society as well as acknowledging that many offensive and derogatory terms which refer to specific groups continue to exist within our everyday language. Therefore, inclusive language does not portray any individual or group in a negative stereotype, as dependent, or powerless. Inclusive language should be used in all forms of communication - speech, language, publications, displays, posters, and teaching

material. Where discriminatory or offensive language is being used, we should be prepared to challenge this and provide alternative phrases, words, and representations.

► Valuing Diversity

The University of Windsor has a number of policies related to equity and diversity, including the **University of Windsor Language Equity Policy**:

It is the policy of the University of Windsor that in all its documents, publications and communications there shall be respect for individual worth, dignity, integrity and capacity. The University of Windsor is committed to language equity which avoids stereotyping and labeling, and which promotes an environment in which learning and working are enhanced by the equitable treatment of all persons no matter what their race, creed, colour, sex, national origin, age, disability, or sexual orientation, in accordance with applicable national and provincial laws.

Approved by University of Windsor Senate and Board of Governors, 1991

Such policies assist the University to develop an environment that respects and values the diversity of its faculty, staff, and student population and ensures people can work and study in

an environment free of harassment and discrimination. Such an environment is created, in large part, through the interpersonal behaviour of individuals and in the language of communication used in interactions. Expressly, it is the use of **inclusive language** by members of the University community that plays an important part in creating such an environment.

The expectations about the way in which we relate to others in the University as an educational institution and a workplace are different from the way we might relate to people in our own home. In great part, this is because the University is a 'public space' rather than a private space. As an employer and as an education provider, the University of Windsor is legally obliged to ensure people can work and study in an environment that is free of harassment and discrimination and which is not hostile or demeaning.

This brochure will have three main purposes:

- a) to uphold and promote inclusive language as set out in the University of Windsor Language Equity Policy
- b) to assist faculty, staff and students in using inclusive language
- b) to raise awareness about language use - inclusive language can foster a culture of respect and equality in the University

► **Language is important**

It is the rich diversity of our faculty, staff and students that is the University's biggest asset. In our University, it is wise to assume that in any group, there will be people from a number of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, with visible or hidden disabilities, representing different gender and sexual preferences, and holding different religious and spiritual beliefs. Each of us has a responsibility to be sensitive to the diversity of our audience, whether talking informally with one person, speaking in a lecture or addressing a meeting. We also have a responsibility to make sure that reasonable members of our audience do not perceive what we say as being sexist, racist, homophobic, discriminatory, or otherwise offensive. Jokes made at the expense of others depend on and propagate demeaning stereotypes. Even where no harm is intended, such jokes can be deeply offensive.

► **Language is a powerful tool; it shapes and reflects our realities.**

Language is used to present and perpetuate particular views of society and of 'others'. Language can consciously or unconsciously offend, intimidate, reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to unequal status of individuals. This is particularly important when people are in positions of relative power, or where there are limited opportunities for the audience to challenge and question what is being communicated.

► **Language is not value-free; it is value-laden.**

Language is a dynamic medium; language is constantly changing and many terms and phrases used in the past are no longer acceptable. For example terms such as 'Red Indians', or 'Eskimos', have now been replaced by 'First Nations', or 'Inuit'.

► **Language and gender**

Language that privileges one gender over another, and/or which diminishes the role and status of one gender or renders them invisible is often termed *sexist*. Traditionally, such language has tended to diminish women and privilege men. Language that marginalizes or parodies people who are transgender or intersex is also unacceptable and discriminatory.

Demeaning and trivializing language should be avoided. Terms such as dear, sweetie, love, ladies, chicks, girls are often patronizing and condescending in certain situations. The use of man in the generic sense, as a verb or in compound words, should also be avoided.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>You can say</i>
The office girls	The administrative staff
Manning the booth	Staffing the booth
Mankind	Humankind, humanity
Workman	Worker
Woman lawyer	Lawyer
Hermaphrodite	Intersex

Tranny
The pronoun which represents the gender expressed by the transgender person i.e., him or her, she or he

► **Language and sexuality**

Language that categorizes people negatively on the basis of their actual or assumed sexual preference is often extremely negative and offensive. In circumstances where reasonable people would never make comments about other personal attributes, it is still common to hear derogatory remarks made about lesbians, bisexuals or gay men. While members of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community have reclaimed some terms as a means of empowerment, it is not generally acceptable to use terms such as 'dyke' or 'queer'. Often the term 'gay' is used generically to include both men and women; however, phrases such as 'That's so gay' are demeaning and are not acceptable. Use inclusive terms such as 'partner', rather than 'husband', or 'wife'.

► **Language and racialization**

Language that labels and stigmatizes a group by linking it with race or racial attributes and at the same time privileges whiteness. Racialization in language is negative and offensive because perceptions based on 'race' are used to discriminate and differentiate individuals and groups whilst creating and perpetuating stereotypes. Phrases such as 'Siamese twins, Indian giver' which use racial or ethnic descriptors should be avoided. (Guidelines for Bias-Free Language, p.49).