Inclusive language puts our humanity at the center; it allows everyone to feel recognized, valued, invited and motivated to contribute at their highest level. To become an anti-racist institution, OHSU must take concrete action to change our culture and the experiences of OHSU members and stakeholders. If our words but not our deeds change, we have failed. Yet learning about and using respectful, identity-affirming language is key to creating a welcoming environment that is anti-racist and embraces diversity as a whole.

The OHSU Inclusive Language Guide is intended as an evolving tool to help OHSU members learn about and use inclusive language in institutional communications, patient care (including chart notes), instruction and presentations around descriptors of:

- Race and ethnicity
- Immigration status
- Gender and sexual orientation
- Ability (including physical and mental attributes)

This guide is a direct response to requests from many OHSU members in the wake of President Danny Jacobs’ June 2020 proclamation that OHSU will work to dismantle systemic racism. Campus leaders in diversity, equity and inclusion and in communications convened an Inclusive Language Project Team. The team surveyed key stakeholders. (See appendix.) Survey responses made the case for a guide:

- Among 272 survey participants using a 1 to 5 scale, “4” or “agree” was the mean response to the statements:
  - OHSU needs an inclusive language guide to better reflect, achieve respect for all.
  - A guide would help improve my work and interpersonal communications.
  - A guide would help me and/or my unit become better informed about matters of identity and respect.

- Said one respondent, “I love the idea of having an OHSU standard for how to identify race and ethnicity. It will make me feel better about my employment at OHSU to have this attention on respect and diversity.”

It will take time to update language across platforms and software applications such as Epic and Oracle. Often, change related to gender and race will require conversations with vendors and the evolution of government descriptors. In some instances, arriving at standard descriptors is not possible given the diversity of human identity and the imprecision and evolution of descriptors. But OHSU members have made clear that education and guidance where possible is needed.
**Principles**

The goal of using inclusive language is not transactional – it is not about getting it right or wrong as much as it is about a paradigm shift.

Like the saying that history is written by the victors, discourse tends to be dominated by the majority point of view in any given situation. In general, discourse in American society has tended to center the experience of people who are white, heterosexual and cisgender (their gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth), setting this experience up at the norm and everything else as an exception or deviation. By contrast, acknowledging and affirming difference from the outset shifts to the premise of honoring and inviting multiple perspectives, and celebrating rather than suppressing diversity.

The intention of this guide is not to be prescriptive as much as instructive. The more we understand about language, descriptors and their meanings, the more we can be intentional about how we speak and the impact of our words. To develop this guide, we used insights from survey participants combined with scholarly and journalistic sources to offer the following principles to help you think about word choice:

- **Identity is personal**: Every individual has the right to describe themselves as they wish. One survey respondent said, “As a fat person, I’m offended by the word obese, as many fat people are. Many fat people reclaim the word ‘fat.’” Among people who fit the U.S. Census description of Hispanic (descending from a Spanish-speaking country), diversity — and the ways individuals describe themselves — is vast. This guide offers insight on general terms that does not supersede how individuals choose to describe themselves.

- **Safe space**: Not everyone wants to share their identity. If you are leading a group or setting the stage in a conversation, create space for people to show up as they are to the extent that they wish to. A survey respondent said, “We need to allow people at the individual level to choose whether they wish to disclose their individual identities. Respect for privacy is important.”

- **Ask**: When interacting with people for the first time, describe your intention to use respectful language and ask, “How do wish for me to refer to you?” One survey respondent suggested, “When caring for a patient who is from a culture or group you are unfamiliar with, you must ask them how you can make them feel safe and respected.”

Sharing how you wish to be addressed is one way to establish a dialogue in a group setting: “Welcome to our class. I’m Dr. Neville. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I identify as Jamaican; it’s where my parents are from. I grew up in Seattle. I’d welcome knowing how each of you would like to be addressed or anything else you would like us to know so that we can honor our diversity and refer to each other respectfully. But what you choose to share now or in the future is up to you, and if you wish to share information privately with me, that’s also OK. I just want everyone to feel invited to be who they are in this class.”
• **Be specific:** We often hide behind vague words or generalizations when we are uncomfortable, such as using the word “diverse” to refer to people who are not white and heterosexual. But this is incorrect. Diverse refers to two or more people who are different from one another. Diverse is not defined as a person or people who are different from you, as if you are the norm and they are diverse.

If referring to a wide spectrum of nonwhite people and specifying race is relevant, you might say, “people of color and/or individuals who identify with other underrepresented groups” (if, in fact, they are underrepresented, such as in medicine or science). Or if you know the specific makeup of a group, you could just be specific.

As one of the survey respondents said, “Since I have switched to saying what I mean rather than hiding behind vague terms, I have been much more effective in building relationships and making necessary points about how to move forward in issues that surround race.” Another said, “Use clear, unambiguous language.”

• **Be thoughtful and intentional:** When is it even appropriate to call out a person’s race or physical or mental attributes? We recommend being thoughtful. In a chart note, for example, one provider suggested including race and other such personal attributes in the social history but not in an introductory statement about a patient where such attributes can trigger bias. So rather than introducing the patient as a 25-year-old, Black woman, you would instead include her race in the social history because we know that a patient’s race is a social determinant of health.

• **Be kind and affirming:**
  o **People-first language:** We are all people with various attributes, but we are people first. We may be a person with a disability; and/or a person who lives with mental illness; and/or a person who is gay or heterosexual. It is generally advised not to lead with the attribute, as if that attribute defines the whole person. So avoid describing someone as a disabled person, a mentally ill person or a heterosexual person. An important exception relates to transgender people. In addition to describing a person as an individual of transgender experience, accepted terminology may include a transgender person, transgender woman or transgender man, using the gender the person has transitioned to. (See more later in this guide)

  o **Avoid labels:** Instead of “addict” use, “a person with a substance use disorder.” Instead of labeling a patient “noncompliant” in a chart note, say “did not complete treatment” or “stopped taking medication.” When we label people, it is as if that word wholly and forever defines them; it can also trigger biases in others. As people, our attributes can change over time. A person with a substance use disorder today may be a person in recovery tomorrow.
Use asset- not deficit-based language: The goal is to focus on strengths. Here are examples from the grant-writing world:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deficit based</th>
<th>Asset based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our mission is to give voice to the voiceless.</td>
<td>Our mission is to amplify the voices in our community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The communities we serve are strong and powerful.</td>
<td>The communities we partner with are strong and powerful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We provide youth with jobs in order to prevent them from committing crimes.</td>
<td>Youth in our community are our future. We must invest in them as leaders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Intellectual humility:** Acknowledging that you understand the importance of, and intend to use, respectful language shows and invites humility. At the same time, avoid burdening others with your learning curve. So rather than, “I’m really trying to use inclusive language, but sometimes I mess up, so cut me some slack,” try, “I’m learning more about inclusive language and will try hard to get it right. Thank you for your patience.”

- **Gender neutral language:** “You guys,” or “ladies and gentleman,” can be “you all” or “folks” or “welcome to all!” to include individuals who identify as transgender or nonbinary. This is equally important in other areas where gendered language prevails. “Pregnant people or person,” for example, rather than “pregnant women or woman.” Other examples may include “parent(s)” instead of “mother(s) and father(s)” or “sibling” instead of “sister” or brother” or “chair” instead of “chairman.” In clinical realms, gender-neutral language can also be used when referring to anatomy or parts of the body.

- **Capitalization:** OHSU uses the Associated Press Style Guide on communications platforms. The AP’s thoughtful attention to evolving language has inspired continued confidence in this tool.

**Black:** In summer 2020, the AP began capitalizing Black in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense, conveying an essential and shared sense of history, identity and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and within Africa. The lowercase black refers to the color, not a person.

**Indigenous:** Capitalized when referring to original inhabitants of a place. These two decisions align with long-standing capitalization of distinct racial and ethnic identifiers such as Latino, Asian American and Native American.

**brown:** The AP does not capitalize “brown” as in “brown people,” as it is a broad and imprecise term in racial, ethnic or cultural references unless capitalized as part of a direct quotation. Interpretations of what the term includes also vary widely.
white: The AP continues to lowercase the term white in racial, ethnic and cultural senses. The AP reasons that white people generally do not share the same history and culture, or the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color. The AP agrees that white people’s skin color plays into systemic injustices. But capitalizing the term, as is done by white supremacists, risks subtly conveying legitimacy to such beliefs. The AP acknowledges that some view this decision as inconsistent or discriminatory. Others say capitalizing the term could pull white people more fully into discussions of race and equality. The AP plans to track how thought evolves and periodically review the decision.

Race and Ethnicity
The following is intended to educate about descriptors of race and ethnicity to assist in choosing respectful and affirming language when referring to individuals and groups in a general sense:

Broad terms referencing individuals/groups

BIPOC: Stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Some individuals and groups have embraced this descriptor, while others feel alienated or unacknowledged by it. “People of color” is also widely used, but some point out that white is also a color or may not wish to be defined by their skin color. Others note that BIPOC centers race/ethnicity, not gender diversity. In general, this guide recommends “Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Asian and other people of color” as a broad term and the use of more specific descriptors when those are known or relevant.

Underrepresented: The general phrase “underrepresented” or “members of underrepresented groups” is appropriate and is especially preferred when you can be specific and accurate. For example: Black students and/or transgender students are “underrepresented in medicine” or “underrepresented in dentistry.” An appropriate reference would be, “A goal of the scholarships is to provide financial support to students identifying with under-represented groups.” Note:

- Not all individuals of color are under-represented in the health professions. Individuals who identify as Asian (a large, diverse category) are not underrepresented in medicine, for example. This does not mean that they don’t experience racism or discrimination. And, several Asian subgroups, such as Pacific Islander, are underrepresented in medicine.
- The term minority (or “underrepresented minority”) centers people in the majority, usually white people, and doesn’t account for the fact that in some groupings, “minorities” are in fact in the majority.
Specific terms for specific groups (see Latino/Hispanic on final page)

American Indian or Alaska Native
The category “American Indian or Alaska Native” includes all individuals who identify with any of the original peoples of North America and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment. Oregon has nine recognized tribes. (See Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx table for a section on Mesoamerican Indigenous people.)

Arab & Arabian
Arab is an umbrella term for a pan-ethnic group of people, composed of many ethnicities. Generally, and even more so presently, Arabs descend from member nations of the Arab League, 22 nations and territories formed in 1945. However, there are people who live in Arab countries who do not consider themselves Arabs, such as the Kurds.

Arabs are also not necessarily Arabians. Arabians are people from the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian Peninsula is now home to Arabic peoples, so you could say that Arabians are Arabs, but not all Arabs are Arabians, since many live off of the peninsula. The Arab peoples are united by an identity of a shared culture and history.

Most Arabs speak Arabic, which is a language and not meant to refer to the people, though you could say “Arabic-speaking people.” (See also Middle Easterner.)

Asian
An individual who identifies with one or more nationalities or ethnic groups originating in the Far East, Southeast Asia or the Indian subcontinent.

Black/African American/African
The most inclusive term is Black people, denoting a shared sense of identity and experience in this country related to skin color and not narrowing by the gender “men” or “women.”

African American is technically accurate for individuals and groups who identify as Americans and trace their ancestry to Africa. Afro-Caribbean American denotes people who identify as Americans and trace their ancestry to both Africa and the Caribbean. Caribbean American denotes those who identify as American and solely with Caribbean ancestry.

African is a person of African descent. The person may not identify with Black, or African American, culture.

Middle Easterner
A person or a descendant from the Middle East. The Middle Eastern countries are: Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Northern Cyprus, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Afghanistan and Pakistan, are not included in the Middle East. These nations, as well as Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and even Djibouti and Somalia, have been referred to as part of the Greater Middle East.
Native Hawaiian
An individual who is Native Hawaiian or is a descendant. They are the aboriginal Polynesian people of the Hawaiian Islanders and/or their descendants.

Pacific Islander
An individual who identifies or descends from the Pacific Islands or ancestry. The three major subregions include Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. A U.S. Census term, referring to one of eight groups — Fijian, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Northern Mariana Islander, Palauan, Samoan, Tahitian, and Tonga Pilipino.

Persian
Persian can refer to people of Iran and a language. But, when referring to people, Persians are Iranians who speak the Persian language (Farsi). The term Persian people historically meant “from Persis,” which is around Pars, Iran, north of the Persian Gulf. With this definition, not all Iranians are Persians, but all Persians are Iranians, nationally.

However, some now designate Persian people as a pan-ethnic group (like the Arab people above) and use it as a demonym to define all people of Iran. If you’re unclear, it’s probably safer to describe someone from Iran as Iranian.

Final note: Since we stated that the origin of the term “Persian people” originally meant someone from Persis, many Iranians often use “Persian” to make a locational distinction, rather than an ethnic one. Thus, there may be non-Persian people (who don’t speak Farsi) whom Iranians deem Persian, based on them being from the Persian region. Learn more.

Roma, Romany, Romani
The Roma or Romani (also spelled Romany) are a traditionally itinerant ethnic group. Oregon has a large Roma community. They are often called Gypsies, but this is a term with negative connotations of illegal activity, and many Roma do not identify with it. Romany (with a y) usually refers specifically to Romanichals, the native Romani subgroup in England. Learn more.

Russian Old Believers
The Russian Orthodox Old Believers (starovery) are descendants of medieval Russians who refused to adopt the mid-17th century church reforms as promoted by Czar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov and implemented by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow. A large part of the population considered the changed rituals sacrilegious. Therefore, the Old Believers are also referred to as Old Ritualists (staroobryadtsy). Many Russian Old Believers live in Oregon. Learn more.
Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine: Latino/Latina/Latinx is an acceptable broad descriptor that acknowledges various descriptors used to refer to men, women and nonbinary individuals. This phrase technically refers to people of Latin American heritage but is also used interchangeably with the word Hispanic, which includes descendants from all Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain. Following is primer on these and related descriptors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Commentaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>generally refers to</td>
<td>Latino was recorded as early as the 1940s in the U.S. and ultimately shortened from the Spanish Latinoamericano, or Latin American. The U.S. Census introduced the term Latino in 2000 and the term Hispanic 20 years earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>describes a person who has lineage to a Spanish speaking country, or whose heritage derives from it. It is not a prerequisite to speak Spanish. Includes Spain but excludes Brazil where Portuguese is spoken.</td>
<td>Hispanic and Latino can be viewed as interchangeable terms to describe the ethnicity and heritage of a population that makes up nearly 20% of the United States population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>is a term used to describe individuals who are of/or relate to Latin American origin or descent. This term is a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina.</td>
<td>During the Civil Rights Movement, there was a cry to recognize U.S. Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban populations. The term Hispanic was adopted as a federal heritage category introduced in the 1980 U.S. Census. The term caught on, with support of Spanish-language TV and became a more broadly accepted label.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American, Chicana, Cubano/a, Guatemalteca/o, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Dominico, Dominicana etc.</td>
<td>Personalized - Individuals tend to identify or be influenced by their origin, roots, and/or heritage to Spain or a Latin American country.</td>
<td>The Pew Research Center National Survey found that one in four U.S. Hispanics/Latinos have heard of Latinx but only 3% use it. Some call it linguistic imperialism -- English policing the Spanish language; Latinx does not correspond with Spanish grammar or conventional speech. The Real Academia Espanola, preserver of the Spanish language, rejected the term. Merriam-Webster added it in 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesoamerican Indigenous – a term used to describe Indigenous people from Mexico and Central America.</td>
<td>The Historical Linguistics of Native America notes more than 125 languages native to Mesoamerica. Language families include: Mesoamerica are Mayan, Mixe-Zoquean, Otomanguean, Tequistlatecan, Totonacan, Uto-Aztecan, and Xinkan. Not all speak Spanish.</td>
<td>Societies that flourished more than 1000 years before the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Mesoamerican Indian/Indigenous cultures have a common origin in the pre-Columbian civilizations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Spanish language also uses pronouns el, ella, ellos, nosotros and formal and informal language— tu y usted.*
**Immigration status**

Just as American language has tended to center on the white experience, descriptors of immigration status tend to center on and affirm people with citizenship. They tend to dehumanize, criminalize and/or vilify those without citizenship. This diverts attention from the circumstances that led them to leave their countries and from the barriers to legitimacy they’ve encountered in the U.S., and puts the “blame” solely on the individual or family. Inclusive language around immigration status affirms and acknowledges the legitimacy of everyone as human beings:

**General references**

Rather than referring to individuals or groups with such dehumanizing terms as alien or illegal alien or simply illegal, the word undocumented is advised, ideally:

- The family is undocumented, not they are an undocumented family.
- Or, the family lacks documentation; or lacks a path to citizenship.

**Glossary of terms**

**U.S. citizens**
People who were born in the U.S. or who have become “naturalized” after being permanent residents. Entitled to receive every benefit as other every U.S. citizen.

**Permanent or conditional residents**
Legal permanent residents (LPRs) are those who have a “green card.” A green card holder, or lawful permanent resident, has authorization to permanently live and work in the United States. Green card holders have all the benefits of U.S. citizenship except voting.

**Non-immigrants**
People in this category are in the country legally but only on a temporary basis. Examples:

- Students (F-1 visa)
- Business visitors or tourists (B1/B2 visas)
- Fiancées (K-1 visa)
- Individuals granted temporary protected status

**Undocumented**
People who are in the U.S. without permission are undocumented either because they overstayed a legal temporary visa or they entered the U.S. without going through a port of entry. They are not authorized to work or access public benefits. People who are undocumented risk being deported. This creates a highly stressful and unstable living situation.

[Full listing of terms for immigration glossary.](#)
Sexual orientation and gender identity

Sexual orientation is an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Sexual orientation is not the same as, and is also independent of, gender identity.

Glossary and respectful language tips

Sexual orientation

Asexual – A person who does not experience sexual attraction.

Bisexual – A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

Gay – A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Lesbian | A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Gender identity

AFAB and AMAB: Acronyms for assigned female at birth and assigned male at birth.

Agender: A general term to describe someone who has no gender.

Ally: Any non-LGBTQ person who helps or supports an LGBTQ person or the LGBTQ community; also used in the context of race, as in “white ally” to people of color, or, “white accomplice.”

Assigned gender: The gender a person is identified as at birth, usually based on their anatomy.

Cisgender: People who identify with their assigned gender. From the Latin prefix cis-, which means “on this side of,” as opposed to trans-, which means “on the other side of.”

Gender-affirming surgery: Any surgery that changes a person’s body to align with the person’s gender identity. This may involve chest reconstruction (commonly called top surgery), genital reconstruction (also called bottom surgery) and other physical changes.

Gender dysphoria: A person’s deep dissatisfaction, anxiety or distress about the disparity between their gender identity and assigned gender. Not all transgender people have dysphoria.
**Gender expression:** The external ways in which people show their gender. This could be through their name, pronouns, appearance, voice, mannerisms and other means. Transgender people’s gender expression often matches their gender identity. But gender expression doesn’t always fit society’s defined roles.

**Gender fluid:** This means having a gender identity that changes — long term, day to day or on any other timeline.

**Gender identity:** A person’s inner sense of their gender, whether it’s male, female, a combination of both, fluid or neither. Transgender people’s gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth. Your gender identity may not be obvious to other people.

**Gender nonconforming:** A descriptive term for people whose gender identity or expression doesn’t fit traditional male and female roles and behavior. It doesn’t necessarily mean transgender. For example, someone who was assigned male at birth and who identifies as male but whose gender expression does not fit traditional male roles may consider themselves gender nonconforming but not transgender.

**Genderqueer:** Another term for gender nonconforming.

**Intersex:** This is an umbrella term to describe people born with chromosomes, hormones and/or anatomy that is not typically male or female. Intersex people can be any gender, including transgender or gender nonbinary.

**Multigender:** Identifying as two or more genders. People who identify as two genders may call themselves bigender.

**Nonbinary:** Anyone who identifies as neither male nor female. Some nonbinary people consider themselves transgender; others do not.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity or gender expression is different from the gender they were assigned at birth. Not all transgender people change their bodies with hormones or surgery, and not all match their gender identity with their gender expression. Transgender is sometimes shortened to trans. Neither is used as a noun.

**Transition:** The process of aligning gender expression with gender identity. Transition is different for every transgender person. Some make social changes, such as using a different name and pronouns, or wearing different clothes. Some use hormone therapy to change themselves physically and emotionally. Others choose surgery. Many choose a combination. Transitioning may be public, including telling family, friends and co-workers. It may include changing your name and gender on legal documents. Or it may be private.
**Being respectful**
Most of the time, a person’s gender is irrelevant. If it is relevant with a transgender person, there are ways to be respectful.

**Terms to avoid**
Terms vary by region, ever-evolving language and other factors. In some cases, a person may find that one of the following terms best describes their experience. But in general, these terms are outdated, and we avoid them.

**Biological male/female, born a man/woman:** Considered derogatory. Use “assigned male/female at birth” or “designated male/female at birth.”

**Gender identity disorder:** This is an obsolete medical and psychological term for gender dysphoria.

**Hermaphrodite:** Outdated, offensive term for intersex.

**MTF and FTM:** Old acronyms for male-to-female and female-to-male. Transgender woman and transgender man are generally accepted terms instead.

**Preferred name, preferred pronoun:** Like anyone, a transgender person’s name and pronouns are what they call themselves, not what they prefer to be called. For the same reason, avoid “real name.”

**Pre-operative, post-operative:** Whether a transgender person has had gender-affirming surgery may have nothing to do with transitioning. It’s usually an invasion of privacy to describe someone in such terms.

**Sex-change operation:** Many transgender people who have surgery — and not all do — see themselves as affirming their gender, not changing it. Gender-affirming surgery is preferred.

**Sexual orientation:** This refers to a person’s romantic or sexual attraction to others. It is not the same as gender identity.

**Tranny:** Offensive to most transgender people, even though some use it to describe themselves.

**Transgendered:** Incorrect adjective for transgender, the same as saying someone is “maled” or “femaled.”

**Transsexual:** An older adjective for people who have changed, or want to change, their bodies to align with their gender identity. Some transgender people use the word to describe themselves, but many do not.
Best practices

- If you’re unsure what name or pronoun someone uses, politely ask. It’s usually OK to ask: “What pronouns do you use?” Remember, it’s not what pronouns they “prefer.”
- Do your best to use someone’s name and pronouns consistently, even if you knew the person by another name.
- Acknowledge any language mistakes you make and how it may make the person feel.
- Talking about a transgender person’s previous identity is called deadnaming. It’s disrespectful. If you don’t know how to refer to someone in the past, ask. If the person doesn’t want to discuss it, respect that.

Learn more

- Human Rights Coalition
- University of Maryland Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Equity Center
- Glossary of LGBT terms, National LGBT Health Education Center | en español
- How to Be Human: Talking to People Who Are Transgender or Nonbinary, Healthline.com
- Understanding Transgender People: The Basics, National Center for Transgender Equality
- Standards of Care Version 7: Glossary, World Professional Association for Transgender Health (scroll to Page 95 for glossary)
- Glossary of Terms, Human Rights Campaign
- Glossary of Terms – Transgender, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
- The Radical Copyeditor’s Style Guide for Writing About Transgender People

Ability, Physical and Mental Attributes
Following is a glossary promoting language around ability and physical and mental attributes. The Community of People with Disabilities is by definition inclusive and intersectional. At the request of OHSU members, we have also added a segment on body weight.

Ableism: Discrimination in favor of people who are able-bodied. “After your meeting, will you run down to my office to pick up the documents?”

Able-bodied: A person without a physical disability.

Aspberger syndrome: Also known as Asperger’s, is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. Preferred language is a person with Asperger’s syndrome. Some individuals who live with Asperger’s syndrome call themselves “Aspies.”

Autism spectrum disorder: A complex developmental condition that involves persistent challenges in social interaction, speech and nonverbal communication, and restricted/repetitive behaviors. The effects of the disorder and the severity of symptoms are different in each person. Preferred language is a person with autism spectrum disorder or a person on the autism spectrum.
**Body weight:** People of higher weight experience discrimination and stigma as a result of living in a larger body. A 2020 review analyzed 33 studies related to people’s preferences around weight-related terminology. It identified the terms “obese” and “fat” as the least acceptable among study participants (Puhl, 2020). However, some people of higher weight have reclaimed the term "fat" and self-identify this way (Meadows & Danielsdóttir, 2016). If a person of higher weight encourages you to describe them as fat, then it is appropriate to do as asked, otherwise “higher weight” or “larger body” are preferred.

This does not change the recommendation to avoid using the term to describe someone unless encouraged to do so by that person.

**Deaf person:** A person who is part of the deaf community. The deaf community has its own culture, language(s). [Learn more.](#)

**Hard of hearing:** a phrase used to describe a person usually with mild to moderate hearing loss.

**Hidden/invisible disability:** a non-obvious/hidden/invisible condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

**Neurodiverse:** An adjective most often used to describe autistic people or other people who have neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behavior.

**Neurotypical:** An adjective used to describe people who have typical developmental, intellectual and cognitive abilities. Generally used in contrast with people who are neurodiverse.

**Obvious disability:** a manifestation of the body that indicates some type of disability.

**Person with a disability/people with disabilities:** This represents person first language; see the person, not the disability. Widely, but not universally used in the community for people with disabilities. For example, deaf people and autistic (neurodiverse people) prefer the respective adjectives to proceed people. This illustrates that people with disabilities are not all the same.

**Sanism (mentalism):** A type of discrimination and oppression against a mental trait or condition a person has or is judged to have. The discrimination/oppression often occurs through common phrases, i.e.; “crazy talk,” “mental case,” “lunatic,” “wacky,” “nuts,” etc.

**Substance use disorder:** A disease that affects a person’s brain and behavior and leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal medication or drug. Use instead of “addicted to drugs” or “drug addict.”
Terms to Avoid:

**Ableist language**
Amp/amputee
Cripple, crippled
Diabetic
Gimp
Handicapped
Invalid
Lame
Spaz
The Spectrum/on the Spectrum
Wheelchair-bound, or confined to a wheelchair (wheelchairs are mobility tools, and people are not stuck in them)

**Hearing impaired**: less favored term in the deaf/hard-of-hearing community as the word impaired can have negative connotations and focuses on what a person can’t do.

**Sanist language**
Addict, addicted
Bipolar
Crazy
Deranged
Drug addict
Drug baby
Handicapped
Idiot
Imbecile
Insane
Invalid
Lunatic
Manic
Maniac
Nuts
Opioid addict
Retarded and variants including words with prefixes attached to -tard.
Weird
Best Practices:
Do not try to diagnose or define a person in casual conversation. Examples: That person is on the spectrum. That person is bipolar.

When first meeting a person with a visible disability, don’t lead with, What happened to you? Why do you walk like that? Why are you in a wheelchair? Get to know a person before, if ever, asking about their disability. If a person shares their experience, it is OK to draw them out if they seem to want to talk about it or to just say, Thank you for sharing that with me.

Avoid trying to relate to a person with a disability by referring to people you know. Examples: Hey, (my sister) (my friend) is (in a wheelchair) (blind) (deaf), etc.; There was a kid at my daughter’s school who … Such statements are natural associations occurring in your head but can come across as presumptuous, as if you know what it’s like to be them. If a person with a disability brings up their disability, it is fine to talk about it, but stay within scope. Example, if a person shares that they have a spinal cord injury, you should not jump to a deeply personal question such as how do they get dressed or use the restroom. Stay within the scope that the person introduces.

Don’t start conversations with false flattery. Examples: I couldn’t do what do. You are an inspiration. Start conversations like you would with a person who does not have a visible disability; talk about the weather, parking, coffee or simply, “How’s it going?”
Appendix

Inclusive Language Project Team members
The team was convened in late summer 2020 and completed this guide that December.

- Leslie Garcia, M.S., OHSU Assistant Chief Diversity Officer
- Rosemarie Hemmings, Ph.D., LCSW, Assistant Professor and Director of Social Work, School of Dentistry
- Erin Hoover Barnett, Director of Communications, School of Medicine
- Ian Jaquiss, Interim Coordinator, Americans with Disabilities Act, OHSU AAEO
- Octaviano Merecias-Cuevas, M.A., Lead Diversity Trainer, OHSU Center for Diversity and Inclusion
- Amy Penkin, M.S.W., LCSW, Program Supervisor, OHSU Transgender Health Program

Survey
The Inclusive Language Project Team distributed a survey in September 2020 to stakeholder groups to help shape the guide. Stakeholders were defined as individuals active in campus affinity groups and/or who may have lived experience important to reflect in this guide as well as individuals and teams whose work includes purview over language used at OHSU, such as the OHSU Digital Engagement Team, which sets the tone for language on the OHSU website.

More than 260 people responded to the survey, from the following groups:

- Ability Resource Group
- Anti-Racism Task Force
- Asian/Pacific Islander Resource Group
- Black Employee Resource Group
- Digital Engagement Team (Dig-E)
- Diversity Action Council
- Faculty Senate Leadership
- GME Diversity Committee
- Health Academic Advisory Council
- International Resource Group
- Information Technology Group (ITG)
- Knight Cancer Institute Equity Committee
- Latinos Unidos Employee Resource Group
- Marketing/Communications/Government Relations teams
- Middle Eastern Employee Resource Group
- Native American Resource Group
- Older Employee Resource Group
- Physical Access Committee
- Pride Employee Resource Group
• School of Medicine Diversity Committee
• School of Nursing Diversity Committee
• Social Work Group (OHSU level and School of Dentistry)
• Student Interest Group leaders
• Student Queer Health Alliance
• Transgender Health Program Community Advisory Board
• Unconscious Bias Campus-wide Initiative (UBCI) staff and trainers
• Veterans Employee Resource Group
• Women's Employee Resource Group
• Women in Academic Health and Medicine

Additional Resources

AP Style Guide Blog
• Why we will not capitalize “white”: https://www.apstylebook.com/blog_posts/16

Pew Research Center
• https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it/
• https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/05/gender-neutral-pronouns/

Radical Copy Editor
• https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/10/02/should-i-use-the-adjective-diverse/
• https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/07/03/person-centered-language/
• University of Victoria: Inclusivity Guide
  https://www.uvic.ca/brand/story/style/inclusivity/index.php

Vox