

Style and Writing Guide | Inclusivity

As Minnesota State, we welcome and celebrate our diverse community of students, faculty, staff, and alumni. We strive to create an inclusive atmosphere that respects the broad spectrum of identities and backgrounds of all. As we work together to reach our Equity 2030 goal, communication is a powerful tool for equity.

The Minnesota State Inclusive Style and Writing Guide, as part of the Minnesota State Brand Identity Manual, provides guidelines for ways that we can employ an equity lens and inclusive language, as well as answers common questions that may arise when creating or editing content.

This guide is a first step in what will be an ever-evolving document. Each of these topics is complex unto itself and the language is changing, in some cases very rapidly. This guide is not intended as the be-all and end-all; rather, it is a place to start thinking about the ways we write, aiming to build inclusion and equity through the power of language.

Important to note, the Inclusive Style and Writing Guide provides general guidelines for language use but

does not include a glossary of terms. Please refer to the [Minnesota State Terms of Equity and Inclusion](#) for information on recommended terms.

As part of the Minnesota State Brand Identity Manual, the Inclusive Writing Style Guide is intended for communications professionals and system office employees and to serve as a resource and model for our colleges and universities. Many academic disciplines have their own writing style guides and we recommend reviewing these guides through an equity lens and incorporating inclusive language principles.

The methodology in developing the Minnesota State Inclusive Style and Writing Guide was through a consultative and collaborative approach. We appreciate the thoughtful feedback and deliberations. The guide primarily premises its guidance from the Associated Press Stylebook, cross referencing other journalistic guides and resources, and considers the input we received in decision-making. Again, inclusive language is ever-evolving and preferred terminology and usage will not always be agreed upon.

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We understand that we must continually research, listen, collaborate, and study these important topics. We strive to continually update the guide with relevant resources as they develop. Should you have any questions, feedback, or concerns, please contact the Minnesota State Marketing and Communications Division MarComm@MinnState.edu.

Guiding Principles for Inclusive Language

Communicate with people-first language. People-first language, also called person-first language, is a way of communicating that puts the person or people ahead of their characteristics. Instead of *a blind man* or *the homeless*, use *a man who is blind* or *people experiencing homelessness*. People-first language keeps the individual as the most essential element and considers all other descriptive social identities as secondary. Mention characteristics like gender, sexual orientation, religion, racial group or ability only when relevant to the discussion.

Defer to self-identification. Learn how distinct groups or individuals prefer to self-identify. There may not be universal consensus about terminology. For instance,

some Indigenous Americans use the term Native American, while others prefer American Indian or First Nation.

Use an asset-based approach, when possible. Framing is the choices we make in what we say and how we say it. Choices on what we emphasize, how and what we explain and what goes unsaid impact how people hear and what they understand. An asset-based approach is a narrative framing, also sometimes referred to as a strength-based approach, that focuses on the positive attributes, strengths, and outcomes, of a person or group, rather than problems and barriers. It shifts communication on what might be lacking (known as a deficit-minded approach), and spotlights on the positive and/or empowers. Think of it as *what's strong?* Rather than *what's wrong?* It seeks to define people by their aspirations, not their challenges.

Words like *underperforming*, *at-risk*, *vulnerable*, *disadvantaged* are deficit-framing language, which can reinforce negative stereotypes and perceptions or communicate that these are inherent characteristics of a person/people, rather than the result of a set of circumstances.

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An asset-based approach connects disparities and community-wide problems to systemic causes, taking into consideration greater account of historical and systemic forces that led to the inequity. This approach leads with shared values, seeks to empower, and emphasizes collective responsibility for solving problems.

Asset-Based Approach	Deficit-Based Approach
Opportunity focus	Problem focused
Strengths driven	Needs driven
Emphasizing possibilities	Overcoming weakness
Equity gap	Achievement gap
Our mission is to amplify voices in our community.	Our mission is to give voice to the voiceless.
The communities we partner with are strong and powerful.	The communities we serve are strong and powerful.
In Organization X, youth sharpen their problem-solving skills.	Organization X addresses youth's barriers to success.
This initiative aims to strengthen community bonds, cultivating a shared sense of purpose and deepening our collective learning.	This initiative aims to benefit disadvantaged students or historically marginalized groups.

Avoid idioms, jargon, and acronyms. Jargon and acronyms can exclude people who may not have specialized knowledge of a particular subject and impede effective communication as a result. Where jargon and acronyms are necessary, they should be explicitly explained.

Recognize that language evolves. Like our society, language is always evolving. As language, perception, and societal and cultural norms change, it can be challenging to discern what term is accepted. What may be preferred terminology is not always agreed upon or later becomes outdated. Seek continual learning about the meaning and usage of words and how groups or individuals self-identify.

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Ability and Disability

How we define ourselves is a complicated subject for anyone. Dedicate time to understanding specific conditions or disabilities before writing about them. For example, some individuals, such as in the Deaf community, do not consider their respective conditions to be a disability.

Defer to self-identification. When possible, ask people how they want to be described. Some people see their disability as an essential part of who they are and use identity-first language such as an *autistic woman*. Others prefer people-first language, *a woman who has autism*.

Emphasize ability. In general, seek to emphasize abilities, not limitations. Avoid describing an individual as having a disability unless it is clearly pertinent and essential to the narrative. If a description must be used, be specific about the type of disability or symptoms.

Use	Don't Use
Person who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair-bound; confined to a wheelchair
Person who uses a communication device; uses an alternative method of communication	Is non-verbal; can't talk
Accommodation services	Disability services

Use people-first language. In describing groups of people, or when individual preferences can't be determined, use people-first language.

Use	Don't Use
Person with a disability, people with disabilities	The disabled
Man with paraplegia	Paraplegic; paraplegic man
Person with a learning disability	Slow learner, developmentally delayed, retarded
Person who is hard of hearing, a person with hearing loss	Hearing impaired
Individual with vision loss, person who is blind	Vision impaired, blind (the)

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Avoid descriptions that connote pity, such as *afflicted with, battling or suffers from multiple sclerosis, or overcame his disability*. Rather, *has multiple sclerosis, was able to walk again*.

Use	Don't Use
Person who has had a stroke	Stroke victim
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Person with epilepsy	Person afflicted with epilepsy, epileptic
Person with a brain injury	Brain damaged, brain injury sufferer

Emphasize accessibility. Use language that emphasizes the need for accessibility rather than the presence of a disability.

Use	Don't Use
Accessible parking, accessible entrance	Handicapped parking, needs a ramp
Accessible restroom	Disabled restroom

Avoid using the term handicap for a disability.

Avoid using disability-related words lightly or in unrelated situations. Some examples call a person or an idea *crazy, psychotic, blind, moronic, lame, retarded, etc.*; *saying a plan falls on deaf ears or he turned a blind eye*. Words that seem innocuous to some people can have specific and deeply personal or offensive meanings to others.

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Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing (or hearing loss)

Deaf and hard of hearing/hearing loss are not the same thing. Culturally, many in the Deaf community do not see themselves as having a disability and take pride in their Deaf identity. The capital 'D' is used to describe people who identify with the Deaf community, whose primary language is ASL. *Deaf* should be used as an adjective, not a noun, as it describes a person with profound or complete hearing loss.

The lowercase 'd' refers to the physical condition of having hearing loss. People who identify as deaf with a lowercase 'd' will have some degree of hearing loss or might not consider themselves to be part of a distinct linguistic and cultural group.

Deafblind is a condition in which an individual has combined hearing and vision loss. This is also referred to as deaf-blindness or deafblindness. The National Center on Deaf-Blindness retains the hyphen, though the National Center on Disability and Journalism notes terms with or without the hyphen are acceptable. Minnesota's deafblind community does not use the hyphen.

Hearing loss and hard of hearing may be used to refer to people who have mild to moderate hearing loss. While *hard of hearing* is acceptable, *hearing loss* is evolving in popular usage. Avoid *hearing impaired*.

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Behavioral health

Language is also important when speaking about people with mental illness and substance use disorders. According to Mental Health America:

The use of language is critical to ensuring a recovery-oriented and person-centered approach. It is important that people are seen first as people and not seen as their mental health condition.

Use	Don't Use
He has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder; he is living with bipolar disorder	He is (a) bipolar; he is (a) manic-depressive
Died by suicide	Committed suicide
Is receiving mental health services	Mental health patient/case
Person with schizophrenia	Schizophrenic, schizo
Person with substance use disorder; person experiencing alcohol/drug problem	Addict, abuser; junkie
She has a mental health condition or psychiatric disability	She is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed/insane

References and Resources

- » [AP Stylebook](#)
- » [ADA National Network – Writing about People with Disabilities](#)
- » [National Center on Disability and Journalism – Disability Language Style Guide](#)
- » [American Psychological Association Style](#)
- » [Mental Health America](#)
- » [NIH Terms](#)

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Race and Ethnicity

As with all inclusive writing, writing about issues – including those involving race – calls for thoughtful consideration and an openness to discussions with others of diverse backgrounds about what language is most appropriate, accurate, and fair. Avoid broad generalizations and labels. Please refer to the [Minnesota State Terms of Equity and Inclusion](#) for specific race and ethnicity category definitions.

Use of racial or ethnic descriptors as adjectives. When describing groups, do not generally use a racial or ethnic descriptor as a noun. Use of racial or ethnic descriptors as plural nouns are acceptable when clearly relevant and needed for reasons of space or sentence construction.

Use	Use Sparingly
Black people, white people, Hispanic people	He helped integrate dance halls among Blacks, whites, and Asian Americans.

Labels used in reporting data. At times, racial or ethnic data are reported using descriptors that are determined externally, such as those categories required by federal student or employee reporting to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) or the Department of Labor. In these cases, the descriptors used by those agencies may differ from those recommended in this guide. To avoid confusion, data labels as defined by the source or agency requiring them should be used.

Capitalize Black (adj., noun). The use of capitalized *Black* is a recognition and acknowledgment that language has evolved, along with a common understanding that especially in the United States, the term reflects a shared identity and culture, rather than skin color alone.

Use the capitalized term as an adjective in a racial, ethnic, or cultural sense: *Black culture*, *Black literature*, *Black studies*.

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African American is also acceptable for those in the U.S. The terms are not necessarily interchangeable. Follow an individual's preference, if known, and be specific when possible and relevant. *Minneapolis has a large Somali American population because of the refugee settlement. The author is Senegalese American.*

Lowercase brown (adj., noun). Although this term has gained general acceptance, the designation is seen by many as a catchall to describe people of color from vastly diverse ethical and cultural backgrounds. Avoid this broad term, if possible. When used, lowercase the 'b.'

Lowercase white (adj.). The style change to capitalize *Black* prompts the question of how white people as a racial categorization should be identified. This topic continues to evolve and different journalistic sources provide conflicting guidance. Therefore, taking into account the different journalistic considerations and with the consultation and feedback within Minnesota State, the guidance is to lowercase the 'w' in white.

Based on the reasoning to capitalize *Black*, notably the strong historical and cultural commonalities, there is less support for capitalizing *white*. White people generally do not share the same history and culture, or the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color. By capitalizing the term white, as done by white supremacists, it risks conveying legitimacy to such beliefs. We will closely watch how usage and thought evolves, continuing to listen to and consult with the Minnesota State community.

Caucasian, avoid as a synonym for *white*, unless in a quotation.

No hyphen in dual heritage. Do not use a hyphen for terms such as African American, Asian American, Filipino American, etc., when relevant to refer to a person's heritage.

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References to Multiple or Mixed Groups

Avoid broad generalizations and labels. There is no “one size fits all” language when it comes to talking about race. Be specific whenever possible by referring to, for instance, *Black Americans*, *Indigenous women*, etc.

Limit use of acronyms. It is best to avoid the use of acronyms in formal writing. Where they are necessary, they should be spelled out on first-use and explained. Some common acronyms that are used in Minnesota include:

- » ADOS: American descendant of slavery
- » BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and people of color
- » POCl: People of color and Indigenous

Do not use the terms *minority*, *racial minority*. Be specific when race is relevant.

Use of the term *Black, Indigenous, and people of color*. The term *Black, Indigenous, and people of color* is acceptable when necessary in broad references to multiple races other than white. However, be thoughtful in its usage. It is an umbrella term for anyone who is non-white, which implicitly centers white people as the “norm.”

Do not capitalize the word *people* in people of color, as it is not a proper noun. Do not use *person of color* for an individual.

Use	Don't Use
The poll found that Black and Latino Americans are bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact.	People of color are bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact.
Enrollment trends disaggregated by race and ethnicity for the last five years are depicted below.	Minority enrollment trends for the last five years are depicted below.

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Native and Indigenous Peoples and Nations

Native and Indigenous peoples have been displaced from their ancestral land around the world. This guide will focus on terms of address for those who inhabit land that has been colonized by the United States. An inclusive, accurate, and commonly used term to refer to those who inhabited land that became the United States (or, previously, territories) is American Indian and Alaska Native. You may also see the terms:

- » Indigenous People(s)
- » Native People(s)
- » First People(s)
- » First Nations
- » Tribal Peoples
- » Tribal Communities

It is best to learn about the complexities of Indigenous nations and their varied communities. No two tribal nations are the same and writing on them effectively requires understanding their respective government, people, history, art, and environment.

American Indians and Alaska Natives/Hawaiian Natives have a distinct political and cultural identification constructed in and through treaties, executive orders and the U.S. Constitution. American Indian and Alaska Native/Hawaiian Natives' cultural identification is place-based, diverse, and informed by the practices of their culture.

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For Minnesota State purposes in writing about the student body, faculty, staff, or as reference in group definition, the consensus prefers use of the term *Indigenous* (capitalized), though *American Indian* and *Native American* are still acceptable.

Defer to self-identification. Where possible, ask individuals how they prefer to be identified. The person may prefer that you refer to them by their tribally specific nation instead of a broader grouping of Indigenous people.

Avoid referring to Indigenous people as possessions of states or countries. Instead of Minnesota's Indigenous people try the Indigenous people of Minnesota.

Use	Don't Use
Indigenous people of Minnesota	Minnesota's Indigenous people
Hawaiian Natives	Hawaii's tribes

References and Resources

- » [National Association of Black Journalists](#)
- » [Native American Journalists Association of Reporting and Indigenous Terminology](#)
- » [AP Stylebook for race-related coverage](#)
- » [Where did BIPOC Come From?](#)
- » [Diversity Style Guide](#)

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Gender and Sexuality

Writing about gender and sexuality is complex. *Gender* is not synonymous with *sex*. *Gender* refers to a person's social identity while *sex* refers to biological characteristics. Further, *gender identity* is not synonymous with *gender expression*, and neither *gender* nor *sex* are the same as *sexual partner preference*.

The terminology used in gender continues to evolve and there is no universal agreement about many terms. A resource to reference vocabulary of gender can be found at [Minnesota State Terms of Equity and Inclusion](#).

Labels used in reporting data. At times, gender or sex data are reported using descriptors that are determined externally, such as those categories required by federal student or employee reporting to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) or the Department of Labor. In these cases, the descriptors used by those agencies may differ from those recommended in this guide. To avoid confusion, data labels as defined by the source or agency requiring them should be used.

Defer to self-identification. When writing about someone, ask the individual how they prefer to be referred to (e.g., male, female, man, woman, transgender, gender fluid, non-binary, etc.). Ask the individual their pronouns and use them correctly and consistently. Ask, too, if there are any terms they ask not be used in reference to them and in what cases.

Always use a person's chosen name and pronouns. A person's name and pronouns are not optional or "preferred," and their correct name and pronouns must be used.

Do not use a person's deadname. Always refer to the person by their chosen name.

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Use of acronyms. Commonly used “shorthand” references add to the confusion by conflating *gender, sex, gender expression, and sexual partner preference*. The commonly used *LGBTQIA* acronym, which is generally acceptable, includes reference to the following:

- » **Lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual:** sexual partner preference
- » **Transgender:** gender or gender expression
- » **Queer:** may refer to gender, gender expression, or sexual partner preference
- » **Intersex:** sex

Use caution with LGBT, LGBTQ, or LGBTQIA as a group descriptor. It may be tempting to refer to the *LGBTQ community*. However, it is a broad and sometimes loosely bound group of communities, comprising people from all races, religions, cultures, and walks of life. Referring to LGBT or LGBTQ people is usually more accurate than defining it as one community.

Use gender-neutral language. In general, use terms that can apply to any gender. Such language aims to treat people equally and is inclusive of people whose gender does not fall within the gender binary of man or woman. Consider any word or term that has the effect of emphasizing one gender over another. Is there another word that could be substituted? For example: *business owner* instead of *businessman/woman*.

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This list is not all-inclusive; it serves as a framework by which to consider other words.

Use	Don't Use
Chair, Chairperson	Chairman
Crew, Staff, Workforce, Workers	Manpower
Humanity, Humankind, humans, human beings, people	Mankind
Human-made, Human-caused, artificial, synthetic	Man-made
Firefighter, Flight attendant, Server, Peace or police officer	Fireman, Stewardess, Waitress, Policeman or patrolman
First-year student, First-year lawmaker	Freshman student, Freshman lawmaker

Transgender is an adjective (modifying *man* or *woman*—as in *transgender man*, *transgender woman*) that refers to someone whose sex assigned at birth does not match their gender. AP Stylebook allows the use of trans on second reference. Do not use transgender as a noun or the term transgendered.

Pronouns

Minnesota State affirms that an employee has the right to be addressed by the name and pronoun that correspond to the employee's gender. Pronouns can be a way to affirm someone's gender. The use and sharing of pronouns is a public way in which an individual is referred to in place of their name (e.g. "he" or "she" or "they" or "ze" or something else). Previous trainings offered by the Office of Equity and Inclusion have provided information and education on the understanding and awareness regarding the use of pronouns including the relevance and impact on students, staff, and faculty.

- » Use a person's self-identified pronoun, including when a person uses the singular they as their pronoun.
- » Use they as a generic third-person singular pronoun to refer to a person whose gender is unknown or not relevant to context of usage.

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Seek to use gender neutrality. Achieving gender neutrality for generic references to people often involves rewording. There are a number of methods to achieve gender neutrality when writing, as no single method will work in every context. Such methods include: using the plural antecedent, repeating the noun, omitting the pronoun, using the singular pronoun *one* or the relative pronoun *who*, revising the sentence, among other techniques.

Examples:

- » *The students love the books their teacher gave them.*
- » *A writer should be careful not to needlessly antagonize readers, because the writer's credibility would otherwise suffer.*
- » *The programmer should update the records when data is transferred to her by the head office.*
- » *An actor in New York is likely to earn more than one in Duluth.*

Use of singular they, them, and their pronouns. It is ok to use *they, them, and their* as gender-singular pronouns if you cannot rephrase your sentence or other methods do not work. *Every student got a care package delivered to them.*

References and Resources

- » [AP Stylebook](#)
- » [Association of LGBTQ Journalists](#)
- » [GLAAD media reference guide](#)

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Socioeconomic Language

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses not only income but also educational attainment, occupational status, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. Because socioeconomic status is complex, terminology that appropriately describes a level of specificity and sensitivity is essential to minimize bias in language around SES. Lowercase terms denoting socioeconomic status.

Avoid descriptions that connote pity or helplessness. Many individuals and families with incomes below the federal poverty level work full-time, often in multiple positions.

Adopt asset-based or neutral descriptions. Per Guiding Principles, shifting the focus to asset-based or neutral descriptions, such as family educational background or historically excluded or oppressed, emphasizes the structural barriers in policy and practice that denied opportunities and access to certain populations.

Turn attention to the policies and structures, not the people. Focusing on the income of individuals and families makes the choices of employers invisible and removes them from responsibility for addressing poverty. While low-income workers is acceptable, consider whether you could substitute low-wage or describe people as working to make ends meet.

Use	Don't Use
People whose incomes are below the federal poverty threshold	The poor, poor people
People who are homeless, people who are experiencing homelessness	The homeless
Low-income housing, low-income areas of the city, under-resourced	The inner city, the projects, ghetto
People with less than a high school education, opportunity gap	High school drop outs, achievement gap
Food insecurity, food poverty, worker welfare, hunger	Food desert, food stamps, the hungry
Neighborhoods with high poverty rates	Disadvantaged

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References and Resources

- » [Minnesota State Terms of Equity and Inclusion](#)
- » [American Psychological Association Style guide](#)
- » [DC Fiscal Policy Institute Style Guide for Inclusive Language](#)
- » [Erasing the Red Line in Education-Minnesota State History Day 2020](#)
- » [Mapping Prejudice](#)
- » [Redlining in the Twin Cities in 1934: 1960's and Today](#)

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Immigration

Immigration has long been a contentious topic in the United States. Our national history of exclusion based on country-of-origin contributes to, and is part of, both the past and present racism and oppression with which our country continues to reckon. Understanding our history and how it has contributed to and shaped current immigration rhetoric and conversations is important to helping recognize inclusive approaches to talking about immigration.

Avoid use of language that is dehumanizing. When referring to an individual who is residing in the United States without authorization from the federal government, do not use *illegal*, instead use *undocumented* or *unauthorized* immigrant. Undocumented or unauthorized refers to individuals who:

- » are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United States,
- » do not hold a visa to reside in the U.S., and
- » have not applied for legal residency in the U.S.

In [February 2021](#), Tracy Renaud, the acting leader of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, issued a memo instructing the agency's leadership to make the following changes: to no longer refer to people as *illegal alien*, *alien*, or *undocumented alien* in internal and external communications, and to instead use the terms *noncitizen*, *undocumented noncitizen*, or *undocumented individual*.

Use	Don't Use
Immigrant	Alien
Undocumented immigrant, unauthorized immigrant, noncitizen, undocumented noncitizen, undocumented individual	Illegal alien, illegal immigrant, undocumented alien

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Do not refer to diseases or illnesses by a purported country or population of origin. The use of purported country-of-origin in identifying illnesses or disease has a long and xenophobic history. For instance, the 1919 world-wide flu pandemic has often been popularly referred to as “the Spanish flu” due to a mistaken belief that the strain of influenza that started the pandemic originated in Spain. It is most appropriate to refer to diseases or illness by their technical or scientific designation, e.g., COVID-19, instead of using colloquial or slang references.

Use	Don't Use
The Great Influenza, the 1919 influenza pandemic	Spanish flu
COVID-19 pandemic	China flu, Chinese virus

References and Resources

- » [Minnesota State Terms of Equity and Inclusion](#)
- » [Diversity Style Guide](#)

Justice-involved Individuals

An individual can be involved in the justice system in many ways. People with criminal histories are often referred to dehumanizing labels, such as criminals, prisoners, convicts, delinquents, felons, offenders. Even after people complete their sentence of incarceration and return to the community, these labels follow. Terms like ex-prisoners, ex-convicts, ex-felons, and ex-offenders used to stigmatize people affected by the criminal justice system.

It is important to understand our nation’s history of structural racism and immigration as it relates to our criminal justice system and work to address how our language perpetuates continued denial of rights to especially Black and immigrant communities today. For instance, some have connected the origins of our criminal justice system to enforcement of slavery, and the perception that Spanish-speaking immigrants are unauthorized immigrants has led to increased harassment and harsher sentencing of Hispanic individuals in the United States.

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In higher education settings, it is important to recognize that students with past involvement with the justice system or with parents or family members with past involvement with the justice system may be denied access to financial aid or other services or resources based on that involvement. We must work to understand how our policies and processes work against persons with past involvement with the justice system and continue to disenfranchise them and limit their ability to pursue to obtain access to higher education. Using humanizing language is part of that process.

Use	Don't Use
Person with justice system involvement; person impacted by the justice system; person affected by the justice system	Offender, inmate, felon, criminal, convict, prisoner, delinquent
Person with prior justice system involvement; person previously incarcerated; person with justice history	Ex-offender, ex-con, ex-offender, ex-prisoner
Person on parole; person currently under parole supervision; person on probation; person in detention	Parolee, probationer, detainee
Young person with justice system involvement; young adult impacted by the justice system	Juvenile offender, juvenile delinquent
Person with sex offense conviction(s); person previously convicted of a sex offense(s)	Sex offender
Person with sex offense conviction(s); person previously convicted of a sex offense(s)	Sex offender

References and Resources

- » [The Sentencing Project Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System](#)
- » [A Guide for Communicating about those Involved in the Carceral System](#)
- » [Words Matter: Using Humanizing Language](#)

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Addendum

Overview of the Inclusive Writing Guide Creation and Evolving Changes

Recognizing the power of language and the Minnesota State Equity 2030 goal, the Minnesota State Marketing and Communications Division, in collaboration with the Equity 2030 Working Group, jointly put forward the recommendation to create an inclusive writing style guide.

Discussions began in late December 2020, and a subcommittee from the Equity 2030 work group was created in January 2020. The director of executive communications Jodi Niehoff, part of the marketing and communications division, who also participated in the Equity 2030 work group, led the project.

The inclusive writing style guide subcommittee members included:

- » Teri Hinds, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives – Equity 2030
- » Tarrence Robertson, Office of Equity & Inclusion Project Director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- » Ka Her, Office of Equity and Inclusion Executive Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion
- » John Kearns, Director of Change Management
- » Jodi Niehoff, former Director, Executive Communications

Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, Andriel Dees, and Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Noelle Hawton, were regularly consulted and updated throughout the drafting of the guide. Teri Hinds, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives, was also a key participant. The first version of the guide was shared with the Equity 2030 work group for feedback and changes made accordingly. Often changes were straightforward, for any change that was not unanimous, Noelle Hawton and Andriel Dees were consulted and made the recommended decision and the document went on for further vetting.

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In March 2021, presidential liaisons to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion board committee, the Outreach and Engagement Committee, and the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College president were asked to review the document, along with their DEI and communication leaders at their campuses. Their feedback was reviewed and considered by the Equity 2030 subgroup.

In May 2021, additional vetting and feedback was sought from the Minnesota State Equity and Inclusion Council and the Academic Equity Committee, as well as others with specific topic areas of expertise, including for example, the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing.

In June 2021, the Minnesota State Office of Equity and Inclusion Terms of Equity and Inclusion glossary was updated to align with the inclusive writing guide and reflect changes in usage since its last update.

In July, the subcommittee conducted a final review.

In addition to the vetting process, rigorous research went into compiling the inclusive writing guide (see bibliography). As part of the Minnesota State Brand Identity Manual, the inclusive guide will be reviewed as part of a yearly review of the brand manual. For questions or to submit feedback or suggestions, please contact the Minnesota State Marketing and Communications Division at MarComm@MinnState.edu.

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