

Inclusive Language Guidelines



You should always write with the knowledge that your audience includes many people with diverse backgrounds. To account for these different experiences, here are some guidelines offered by MLA that can be applied to all writing, regardless of citation style.

If you are using descriptions that refer to someone's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, disability, age, or socioeconomic status, make sure that it is relevant to the content and point that is being made. Depending on the context, inclusion of these descriptors can be insensitive because it implies that the status is abnormal. In addition, use gender-neutral language in your writing. Gender-specific terms involve assuming someone's gender identity, so it is better to use gender-neutral terms. For example, instead of saying "man-made" you could say "human-made." For this reason, avoid using gender-specific terms such as waiter or actress as well.

Avoid using broad terms that are overgeneralized and conflate different groups together. For example, instead of saying "the Muslim community," a more specific description would be "Sunni Muslims in India." Avoid making assumptions, using stereotypes, or making generalized statements about different populations. Never assume that your audience shares the same understanding of terms and concepts.

Use people-first language so that your subject is not defined by one characteristic or condition. For example, it is typically more appropriate to refer to someone as "a person with autism" rather than "an autistic person." There are some people who prefer language that is identity-first, as in the example "a person with autism." If the subject has made this preference clear, then it is okay to use language that reflects this. However, if preferences for the subject are unknown, it is more appropriate to default to people-first language.

