INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE

Words are powerful. Communication is one of the most essential tools for success in education and the workforce, and in life. As career and technical education (CTE) seeks to empower all learners, we're challenging ourselves to choose language that celebrates our differences and makes everyone feel included.

We acknowledge that this list of resources is not exhaustive, nor will it ever be complete. Language evolves. And we welcome your feedback.

ACTE's Inclusive Language Guide is available for *Techniques* readers and CTE faculty to download and consider. **acteonline.org/tech-inclusive-language-guide**

AGE

Regardless of age, terms such as person and individual are always appropriate. Refer to individuals' age only if it is relevant to the story or the purpose of the writing.

- Individuals under the age of 18 can be referred to as children, youth, adolescents, girls, boys, young men, young women, young people, learners and/or students; they should not be referred to as kids.
- Individuals over the age of 18 can be referred to as adults, people, women, men, students, learners, educators, partners and stakeholders.
- Individuals over the age of 65 can be referred to as older adults, older people, women, men, students, learners, educators, partners and stakeholders; they should not be referred to as the elderly, aging or senior citizens (APA Style, 2021a).

DISABILITY

Refer to individuals' disabilities only if it is relevant to the story or purpose of the writing. Further, understanding that people with disabilities express a range of opinions regarding person-first and identity-first language, all communications should reflect this nuance.

However, "It is permissible to use either approach or to mix person-first and identity-first language, unless or until you know that a group clearly prefers one approach, in which case, you should use the preferred approach. Mixing this language may help you avoid cumbersome repetition of 'person with . . .' and is also a means to change how authors and readers regard disability."

Identity-first language
Identity-first language "allows the individual to claim the disability and choose their identity rather than permitting others (e.g., authors, educators, researchers) to name it or to select terms with negative implications." (e.g., a blind person) (APA Style, 2021b).
- Many in the deaf community prefer identity-first language and may capitalize Deaf "when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language and a culture." Avoid the term hearing impaired (National Association of the Deaf, 2022).

Person-first language
Person-first language emphasizes the person over the disability (e.g., a student with epilepsy).

- Do not use negative and/or condescending terminology, such as wheelchair-bound; say instead, wheelchair user. Likewise, avoid terms that can be regarded as slurs, such as cripple or nuts.

- When discussing individuals with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities, don't use hierarchical labels such as high functioning or low functioning. Likewise, avoid euphemisms, such as special needs and physically challenged. Preferred terms include disabled person, person or student with a disability, person with a mental illness, deaf person, autistic person (APA Style, 2021b).

RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Consider how you can "strive to accurately represent the world and its diversity. Often, [race] is an irrelevant factor and drawing unnecessary attention to someone's race or ethnicity can be interpreted as bigotry. There are, however, occasions when race is pertinent." The Associated Press (2022) and APA Style offer valuable guidance on reporting and writing about issues involving race.

- African American takes no hyphen.

- Avoid euphemisms such as anti-Asian sentiment. Alternatives may include anti-Asian bias, anti-Asian harassment, anti-Asian comments, anti-Asian racism or anti-Asian violence, depending on the situation.

- Asian American takes no hyphen.

- Black is capitalized, but white is not (Associated Press, 2020).

- Do not use Caucasian as a synonym for white, unless in a quotation.

- Do not use either Black(s) or white(s) as a singular noun. For plurals, phrasing such as Black people, white people, Black teachers, white students is preferable when clearly relevant.

- Capitalize Indigenous and Native American as appropriate. Use unless referring to language in legislation and education datasets that uses American Indian.

- Never use language such as illegal aliens or illegal immigrants. Instead, refer to undocumented workers, people who are undocumented, DACA students.

Latino/a/e/x/@, Hispanic, Chicano/a/e/x/@
These terms all have different meanings and represent unique ethnic heritage. Defer to individuals' personal choice of descriptor whenever possible. Hispanic refers to those who speak Spanish. The term Latino and its variations may be preferable among those from Latin America. APA Style (2019a) addresses several gender-neutral variations and says "there are compelling reasons to use any of the terms Latino, Latina, Latino/a, Latine, Latin@ and/or Latinx.

"Use the term(s) your participants or population uses; if you are not working directly with this population but it is a focus of your research, it may be helpful to explain why you chose the term you used or to choose a more inclusive term."

Latinx
This is the preferred usage when speaking or writing about topics that affect Latinx learners, and the preferences of a community or student group cannot be determined

People of color (POC)
This term is acceptable in broad references to multiple races other than white, and preferable over minorities. Similarly, BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and people of color. Be aware, however, that many may still object to the terms POC and BIPOC for various reasons, including that it lumps together into one monolithic group anyone who isn't white.

Be specific whenever possible.

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Gender is a representation of social identity. This term is not synonymous with sex, which refers to biological characteristics.

- Avoid using gendered language to refer to large groups of people; for example, use people instead of mankind or chairperson instead of chairman.
- Gender-nonconforming is acceptable in broad references as a term for people who do not conform to gender expectations. (e.g., The group is providing scholarships for gender-nonconforming students.)
- Male and female are adjectives, almost never nouns. APA Style (2019b) notes a few exceptions. "Use as nouns only when the age range is broad or ambiguous or to identify a transgender person's sex assignment at birth (e.g., "person assigned female at birth")
- Do not presume maleness in constructing a sentence by defaulting to he/his/him pronouns. They/them/theirs is acceptable as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun in all cases. APA Style (2019b) recommends against "he or she" constructions because they "imply an exclusively binary nature of gender and exclude individuals who do not use these pronouns. These forms can also appear awkward and distracting, especially with repetition."
- Encourage cisgender educators and students to identify pronouns in biographical info, email signatures, Zoom name displays, and in presentations. This act normalizes pronoun identification and creates a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals. (Cohen, 2021)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer
LGBTQ+ acronym is acceptable on second reference.

Nonbinary
People are nonbinary if their gender identity is not strictly male or female. Not synonymous with transgender.

- People who identify as nonbinary may identify using a variety of pronouns, including he, she, they and others. Regardless of sex assigned at birth, use appropriate pronouns always.

Transgender
Describes people whose gender identity does not match the sex they were identified as having at birth.

- Transition or gender transition refers to the processes transgender people go through to match their gender identity, which may include sex reassignment or gender confirmation procedures but not necessarily.

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ECONOMIC STATUS

Avoid use of terms that imply negative connotations, such as inner-city, the homeless, poverty stricken or the poor. APA Style (2019c) recommends instead using person-first language, such as person experiencing homelessness and families who receive temporary assistance benefits. Note that Perkins V legislation uses the term homeless individual, which should be used when directly quoting the law.

Opportunity gap
Recommended for use instead of achievement gap to highlight the systemic factors that affect student outcomes.

Strengths-based language
Implicit biases lead to an emphasis on deficit language — focusing on weaknesses. Advocates instead want us to focus on strengths, while also acknowledging the "broader societal context that influences individual circumstances." Write about how students lack access and opportunities due to systemic inequities. And how their communities are systemically under-resourced (Chockalingam, 2020.

Avoid low-income unless quoting legislation, as in the Perkins V special population category "individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including low-income youth and adults."

CORRECTIONS AND JUSTICE ISSUES

Avoid using terms such as inmate, offender. Instead, consider the benefits of person-first language: individual affected by the justice system; person previously incarcerated; young person with justice system involvement. The goal is to humanize — not marginalize further.

Justice-involved individual and justice-involved youth are widely used and acceptable when writing or speaking about individuals affected by the justice system.

FAMILIES

Everyone's family looks different.

Instead of mom and dad, or even parents, use a more inclusive term: caregivers.

Simple, inclusive word choices can make all learners feel more valued. Consider the use of family members over members of a household; birth or biological family instead of real family; and children over boys and girls.

Avoid use of subgroup or subpopulation unless quoting legislative text directly. Prefix sub can carry connotations of inferiority, or make others feel less than. Consider student or learner group or population as alternatives.

Marginalized
Used to describe groups who are discriminated against or excluded — politically, socially, and/or economically — due to an unequal balance of power. May refer to past discrimination, as in the usage historically marginalized learners (National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, 2022).

Underrepresented
Used to describe groups who are less represented in a specific area than in the general population. For instance, students with disabilities may be underrepresented (or overrepresented) in certain CTE programs of study (IGI Global, n.d. A).

Underserved/under-resourced
Used to describe groups who experience barriers to accessing vital resources, often due to geographic location, socioeconomic status, disability, etc. (IGI Global, n.d. B).

When speaking or writing broadly, marginalized, underrepresented, under-resourced and/or underserved may be used to describe populations who fit into these categories. However, it is preferred to be specific whenever possible (APA, 2022).

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Special populations

The term special populations is defined in Perkins V legislation and includes nine learner categories:

- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including low-income youth and adults
- Individuals preparing for non-traditional fields
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Out-of-workforce individuals
- English learners
- Homeless individuals
- Youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system
- Youth with parents on active duty in the armed forces

When directly quoting the law, the exact terminology should be used. However, when discussing the special population groups outside of a direct quotation, refer to this resource.

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Techniques

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DIVERSITY

ISSUE

- Recruit diverse students in apprenticeship programs
- Black girls & women can succeed in STEM through CTE
- Developing a richer workforce through inclusive communication (BONUS RESOURCE: Inclusive Language Guide)
- News from the CTE Research Network
- Connect & collaborate to create thriving cultures of achievement