

# THE RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATION STYLE GUIDE

From Recompile Media



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From Recompiler Media

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

## What is responsible communication?

Any time I describe a person, I have an obligation to get the facts right — and to avoid doing harm in the process. What's the point of writing news, documentation, talks, and other non-fiction media if it isn't going to be accurate?

Yet, many writers submit and publish work that is inaccurate, especially around topics of identity. Sometimes those inaccuracies are malicious and purposeful, such as when a publication deadnames a transgender person. Sometimes those inaccuracies come out of ignorance, the way a writer may trip over the singular “they” when first using it. Intentional or not, talking about identity inaccurately is harmful. Each instance is a suggestion that the person you're describing is not good enough in some way, to the point of denying their humanity. After all, an editor would make the effort to get information about a source or subject correct if that person is important.

A responsible communicator makes the effort to present a diversity of perspectives. Not every subject or source will be happy to be quoted, but a responsible writer creates work that is truthful and inclusive. Irresponsible communication, then, is any communication that fails to respect the humanity of the people it describes. Just as we consider denigration and harassment unprofessional, we also must realize that microaggressions, misnaming and other irresponsible communication undermine the identity of the people presented in any given media.

Irresponsible writing is also, frankly, bad writing. It fails to communicate an accurate picture, and may offend and exclude audiences, even if every sentence is beautifully phrased. In order to avoid these problems, we need tools and training that equip us to write inclusively.

## Why a style guide?

I studied journalism in college (complete with the obligatory internship at the local daily paper). I've slept using my copy of *The Associated Press Stylebook* as a pillow on the off chance that I could learn by diffusion. When I took on marketing jobs after graduation,

I was astounded to find that no one used style guides. I started making my own out of self-defense — I couldn't remember how to format eBay and other camelcase startup names on my own. I quickly discovered that style guides have far more value than just ensuring you know the proper title of federal officials.

A good style guide is one of the keys to writing more and faster. Avoiding style decisions alone offers the same sort of speed boost as word processing. Make your style decisions once, not over and over again. You shouldn't be trying to remember proper spelling when you're writing. After all, good spelling is not the same thing as good writing. Rather, good spelling is good communication through adherence to norms of shared meaning that speed up communication.

Style guides are just a way to make those norms explicit and easy to reference, in a format that you can keep handy while you work. No style guide will have every detail you ever need, but it can collect most of the details you need every day. Similarly, good inclusivity is adherence to norms of respect and a system of ensuring that we communicate only our messages with no added biases or bigotry.

I've made plenty of project-specific style guides and they're crucial for communicating the norms of how to talk about a project. *The Responsible Communication Style Guide* is meant for communicating norms — the norms of how we talk about and to one another in the ever-evolving forms of media we work with, specifically in American English.

## How to use this book

### **THIS BOOK IS A SUPPLEMENT.**

*The Responsible Communication Style Guide* covers five dimensions of identity. Not only are there far more than just five different aspects of identity, it's likely you'll be writing about topics beyond identity and will need additional style guides. Whether you need a copy of *The Associated Press Stylebook* or *PEP8: Style Guide for Python*, please assume that you'll need to rely on multiple resources to address different types of style issues.

### **THIS BOOK IS READABLE AND REFERENCEABLE.**

Reading through pages of definitions isn't useful if you want to remember the material. Consider starting with the articles included in this book first: you'll get an overview of techniques you can add



to your creative workflow, as well as introductions to some new terms in context. Then, as a part of your editorial process, you can reference specific terms in the index or read through just the relevant section you need for your current project.

### **THIS BOOK IS ADAPTABLE.**

If I had my way, every project I worked on would have a style guide of its very own. (I even created an internal style guide for editing *The Responsible Communication Style Guide*.) Whether you're working with writers, editors, developers, designers, or anyone else, having style guides and other tools keeps everyone from having to relearn every detail for themselves. So use this style guide and others to make the tools you need for your projects and teams.

### **THIS BOOK IS A BEGINNING.**

Style guides evolve — especially when dealing with terms around technology. Even if the Associated Press only decided to stop capitalizing “internet” in 2016, you should expect that language will continue to evolve outside of formal definitions. You'll eventually need an updated style guide. Personally, I hope to have *The Responsible Communication Style Guide, 2nd Edition* out long before then. Furthermore, this style guide is a desk reference. It can't cover every facet of human identity in depth. We made choices about what to include and what not to include. There are some topics you'll need additional resources to cover identity beyond just this style guide.

### **ONE NOTE ON HOW NOT TO USE THIS STYLE GUIDE:**

*The Responsible Communication Style Guide* is not a spotter's guide or fieldbook. If you are telling a story that has nothing to do with the character's race, religion, sexuality, gender, or well being, there's no need to diverge from your story for this sort of information. Stick to what your audience needs to know and understand, if only because a programmer's sexuality doesn't really impact whether their unit tests pass.

— Thursday Bram

Editor

*The Responsible Communication Style Guide*



# ON PUBLISHING INCLUSIVE TECH WRITING

— Audrey Eschright

When I started *The Recompiler*, my goal was to produce a magazine that reflected diversity and inclusion on multiple levels: from the contributors themselves, with the experiences they could share, through the language we use to talk about people, and finally in the ways we describe technology and explain concepts. Ensuring our descriptions and explanations are diverse requires asking ourselves, our collaborators, and our audiences questions about our work.

By necessity, technology writing makes assumptions about the reader's previous knowledge and experiences. Any time we think we're avoiding assumptions, we're likely assuming the reader is exactly like us. That's rarely true. A more useful approach is considering the goals and topics of your writing, then considering your readers' likely knowledge. If your readers have a common background and reasons for reading, which can be true of internal technical documentation users, then you could focus on only the new ideas being introduced and how they relate to that shared knowledge. If your goal is broader education for a more diverse audience, you might start at the beginning and think about what every person with a computer and a text editor will know, building up from there. When I work with writers, I ask questions from that reader's perspective: *What does "arrangement" mean in this context? If I've never used pandas before, what do I need to know to use it?*

We're likely to forget that technical readers come in many varieties. Some are programmers with experience in many languages. Some know only one language well. Some wrote their first line of code last week. Others are DBAs and sysadmins who rarely code, but are comfortable with command line tools. Some manage or work directly with technical teams and understand their jargon, but don't work on the technical problems themselves.

When we ignore this diversity of backgrounds, we leave readers behind, and they are likely to be frustrated, disappointed, angry, or demoralized. Our writing fails when it relies heavily on jargon specific to one small field or cultural references of one subculture. It's apt to tell many readers that they don't belong here or even that they aren't smart enough or cool enough to get by. This automatic

exclusion isn't acceptable — *The Recompiler's* goal is that all who want to participate feel included.

I've learned that being aware of these issues is a benefit to readers who aren't fluent in English (we default to American English, specifically) as well. We get used to idioms and jargon and stop thinking about the meaning behind those phrases. When technical and non-technical terms mix, it's especially confusing for English-learning readers.

Here's how I break down how to find the places we can be clearer.

### **WHAT ARE THE MAIN TECHNOLOGIES AND SKILLS THIS ARTICLE COVERS?**

Often this list includes a programming language or piece of software and sometimes other parts of the stack such as the operating system, hardware, or even base concepts like APIs and algorithms. Relevant skills may be querying a database, debugging code, or installing new packages.

### **WHAT'S THE WRITER'S BACKGROUND IN THOSE AREAS?**

The better we know a topic, the more we're likely to make assumptions. It takes more effort if we're going to be sensitive to a newcomer's perspective. Another area to watch out for is when familiarity with a related topic can keep us from using the right conventions to match other materials, such as switching between programming languages or development frameworks. The goal is to use our own base knowledge to empathize with readers, and spot the places we will need to work to clarify.

### **IF THE READERS DOESN'T KNOW X, WHERE X IS ONE OF THE THINGS ABOVE, WHAT PARTS OF THIS WOULD NEED TO BE EXPLAINED?**

If you can think back to a time before you knew this material, try to break down the pieces of what you learned. Do you recall having to look up a particular detail, or ask someone for clarification? If it's too far back to remember, find a test reader who has less experience and can fill in those gaps. The best option, if you have time and resources, is to teach the material to someone new and see directly what problems come up.

### **ARE WE USING WORDS AND PHRASES IN A CONSISTENT WAY?**

Sometimes the area we're writing in doesn't make this easy, and

we'll have to pick from more than one set of conventions. We also need to watch out for terms that are used in one technical area to mean one thing, and a different set of meanings elsewhere. Be explicit, and include a glossary or use footnotes if the context can't be understood inline. In *Recompiler* articles, we bold key terms to aid that clarification.

### **DOES ANY OF THE TECHNICAL JARGON USED MEAN SOMETHING ELSE IN A NON-TECHNICAL CONTEXT?**

This can be one of the hardest things to watch out for when we know a topic well. Particularly when projects or dependencies have “clever” names, we stop thinking about those other meanings. A gem is just a package you add to your Ruby project, and masters and slaves are just different parts of a database system, right? It's important to spend a little time on the names and other terms you're referencing — does a web search or a quick look through the dictionary turn up confusing or conflicting definitions? Is there something the other sections of this *Style Guide* tell you to watch out for?

### **IS THERE ENOUGH INFORMATION HERE FOR SOMEONE TO LOOK THIS UP AND FIND OUT MORE ON THEIR OWN?**

The last thing we need to work toward is helping the reader go out and explore. We can do this by offering the names of preferred reference texts and people who've done significant work on the topic, linking to relevant pages on Wikipedia, and mentioning what the next topic might be after they've learned about this one. This doesn't have to be a full bibliography: often I ask writers to add just a couple of key points to the end of their article.

This may sound like a substantial overhaul, but often it doesn't increase the length of the piece as much as you'd think. It's a matter of choosing the right verbs, adding footnotes, and simplifying paragraphs. If there's more to cover than we can fit in one piece, I'll start planning a follow-up article.

You can sum up most of these items in a checklist:

- Figure out the main concepts you're teaching and what someone needs to know to work with them.
- Identify intended readers and assess whether topics will be new or build on something they already know.

- Disambiguate possible areas of confusion.
- Get readers from your audience to test it out and provide feedback.
- When in doubt, be more specific.

The biggest hurdle, in my experience, is that we have to get over the urge to show off how much we know. So much of our technical communication is overly complicated because it's how we prove we have the expertise. This doesn't serve readers well, and ultimately it doesn't make us look better if we show how clever we are by leaving other people behind. Be kind to your readers. With your help, they can guide their own learning — maybe even to places you'd never expect.

# USING PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

— Meryl K. Evans

One in five Americans has a disability according to the U.S. Census Bureau's "[Americans With Disabilities: 2010](#)" report. That's more than 56 million people, or 19 percent of the population. People with disabilities have the same thoughts, feelings, and dreams as everyone else. Everyone has a unique set of strengths, weaknesses, skills, and experiences to offer.

As a person who is deaf, people often assume I'm fluent in American Sign Language. I'm not. I know the finger alphabet and a few hand signs, something I picked up from a school friend who did her book report on Helen Keller. She passed out cards with the finger alphabet and many of us learned it.

A dignitary signed "thank you" to me in front of an audience. Although I know the sign, I responded, "I don't know sign language." The response wasn't to embarrass him. It was to show that not all deaf people are alike. When you meet two people with the same disability, they're most likely different from each other.

Notice I use lowercase "deaf" to refer to the fact I don't have hearing. However, the word is capitalized when referring to the Deaf Community. Although dictionaries do not capitalize deaf, members of the Deaf Community and culture prefer big "D."

This is the sort of problem that pops up in using person-first or identity-first language.

## What is people-first language?

Here, we will focus on the use of people-first language when discussing people with disabilities. While people-first language is used some communities when discussing other facets of identity, like gender or race, this article will look only at the use of people-first language in the context of disability. People-first language aims to emphasize the person instead of the disability. In short, it replaces "to be" with "to have" to put the condition as secondary.

Instead of saying "She is a deaf person," people-first language recommends using "a woman who is deaf." This goal of the phrase is to show that "she" is a person first, not a disability. Whether she

is deaf is secondary. The people-first approach aims to be respectful by saying that deafness does not define a person. Being deaf is just one of many traits that make someone a person.

Every human being — with or without a disability — has multiple traits. Writing inclusively means considering ways to mention people without dehumanizing them. The people-first approach is part of a larger discussion about how we discuss disabilities. People-first language is one tool.

Other tools consider eliminating some terms, like “handicapped,” entirely. The term originated from “hand in cap,” a betting term that evolved into a verb meaning “to put at a disadvantage.” This term implies that people with disabilities are at a disadvantage and aren’t capable. Terms like “handicapped” are based on outdated concepts of disability — hence, the suggestion to avoid using it.

The table on the next page lists examples of people-first phrases to use instead of the alternative.

Why is “visually impaired” acceptable and “hearing impaired” is not? In ASL, hearing impaired translates into broken hearing. Deaf people don’t see their hearing as broken or as a defect. Some deaf people will argue that being deaf is part of their identity. In this case, they prefer “deaf person” to “person who is deaf.”

## The problem with using people-first language

Needless to say, people-first language sounds unwieldy and uses more letters. “Person who is deaf” is longer than “deaf person.” In our texting and 140-character world, every character counts. People abbreviate things and take shortcuts in how they say something. People-first language does not have shortcuts.

Some terms offend some people. Others don’t. Each person with a disability has their own preference. For example, government reports uses “able-bodied” to describe the number of people in the work force. However, this term can be offensive because to some as it implies people with disabilities lack the ability to use their bodies.

To make matters more confusing, some people, groups, and organizations prefer to use identity-first language over people-first language. Some people believe a disability cannot be separated from the rest of their identity. Do a search for “identity-first



People-First Language	Language to Avoid
Accessible parking or accessible restrooms	Handicapped parking or handicapped restrooms
Person with an amputation	Amputation or amputee
Living with Alzheimer's disease	Suffers from or afflicted with Alzheimer's disease
Person with a disability	Disabled person
Person with asthma	Asthmatic person
People with disabilities	The disabled or the handicapped
Person with an intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disability	Retarded, slow, special, or simple
Person with emotional, behavioral, mental health, or psychiatric disability	Mental, insane, crazy, psycho, or nuts
Person who is hard of hearing	Hearing-impaired or suffers a hearing loss
Person who is deaf	Deaf person, deaf and dumb, or mute
Person who is blind or visually-impaired	The blind
Person with Down syndrome	Mongoloid or a Down's person
Person with a physical disability	Cripple or incapacitated
Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder	Epileptic
Person without disabilities or non-disabled	Normal or healthy
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair-bound
Person who is unable to speak	Mute or dumb

language autism” and you’ll find equal support for both people-first and identity-first language.

In “People-First Language: An Unholy Crusade” from the National Federation for the Blind, C. Edwin Vaughan argues that no one says “people who are beautiful” or “people who are intelligent.” Rather, they say “beautiful person” or “smart person.” “Under the guise of the preferred language crusade, we have focused on disability in an ungainly new way but have done nothing to educate anyone or change anyone’s attitudes,” Vaughan writes.

In the introduction to Dr. Vaughan’s article, the editor writes:

Many of us who write and speak frequently about blindness and the problems that blind people face have struggled in recent years against the increasing pressure to use what has come to be called ‘people-first’ or ‘preferred’ language. It is unwieldy and repetitive, and any ear tuned to appreciate vigorous, precise prose must be offended by its impact on a good sentence.

But proponents of this formulaic circumlocution have decided that mention of the person must always precede reference to his or her disability or the effect will be to show disrespect for the individual under discussion. The result has been to shame many good speakers and writers into forms of expression to which they would never otherwise have stooped. Dr. Vaughan has had enough, and so have many of the rest of us. We are ashamed neither of who we are nor of the characteristics that help to shape us.

Search further and you’ll see many people with different disabilities who feel the same way as Dr. Vaughan and the editor do. It feels like a no-win situation.

How do we know what language to use for identities?

No one style guide will cover every situation or every person’s preferences. But you can take steps to show respect for the identities

of people you work with and reduce your chances of offending someone. The most appropriate step to take depends on where the content is published, who the target audience is, and what the circumstances are, and, most importantly, the preferences of the person you're writing about.

Style guides, like the National Center on Disability and Journalism's, make recommendations for words to use when discussing identities. It also provides backgrounds and explanations for its recommendations. It's not without issues. For example, it says that "typical" can be used to describe someone who does not have a disability. But who can say what's typical and what's not? NCDJ advises to refer to a disability only when it's relevant. This also introduces another problem. How do you know whether a person's disability is relevant?

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention also offers guidelines for people-first language in "Communicating With and About People with Disabilities." You can find guidelines from organizations like these to see what they suggest.

If you're writing about someone with a disability, ask that person what terms to use. If you're creating website content, talk to your target audience. *The AP Stylebook*, for instance, says to use lower case "d" for all usages of "deaf." But if your audience contains the community of people who are deaf that refer to themselves as part of the Deaf Community and Deaf Culture, you'll want to use capital "D."

Here's what you can do for identity-based terms:

- Determine if mentioning the term is relevant.
- Ask the person who is the subject of the content for preference.
- Use the target audience's preference.
- Choose style guides your organization will use such as AP style, NCDJ, city or state government guidelines, CDC, home-grown, or a mix.
- Add identity-based guidelines to a living document or style guide based on consensus.

- Look up a government or organization's guidelines for specific topics, such as National Institute for Mental Health for mental disorder-related terms.
- Avoid all use of “handicapped,” “cripple,” “deaf and dumb,” “invalid,” “mentally ill,” “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” and any other term that suggests pity.
- Avoid metaphors with pejorative connotations such as “deafening silence” or “turn a blind eye.”
- Avoid “courageous” or “overcome their disability” because not all people with disabilities have the trait. (See [Stella Young's TED Talk](#) on this topic.)

Beware that you'll find contradicting information when looking at multiple organizations specializing in the same condition. The [Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) and the [Hearing Loss Association of America](#) use people-first language. The [National Association of the Deaf](#) and the [World Federation of the Deaf](#) use identity-first language, but only WFD capitalizes Deaf. The [National Federation of Blindness](#) adopted an identity-first resolution.

It's clear as mud, right? Perhaps, one compromise is to follow the advice from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's "[Continuing Education Board Manual](#):"

As a general rule, we may wish to follow the preferences of a disability group, even if it violates other principles. The problems with following the desires of different groups occur when one doesn't know what the members of a group want or when the preferences of individuals in a group differ.

Yes, people-first language turns simple sentences into complicated and sometimes awkward sentences. The key is to be sensitive

and respectful of the person or persons you're discussing. Accept that you won't please everyone. Your interview subjects and your audience are the best resources for what to do in discussing identities.



# AVOIDING BAD METAPHORS

— Thursday Bram

When explaining programming concepts, metaphors are crucial: most of us don't automatically grasp every concept necessary to make programs work. Metaphors let us connect new material to concepts we already understand. But the metaphors that are often used to teach programming concepts are not automatically accessible to every person who wants to learn to write code.

We pick metaphors from our own experiences. Are you a sports fan? Then your metaphors of choice might reflect how a ball is passed. Do you like to work on cars? You might explain a concept in terms of an engine. Or are you into woodwork? Comparing programming to carpentry could make sense.

What if you aren't used to working on cars or following sports, though? Metaphors that don't make sense get in the way of learning, especially when we're talking about abstract concepts like programming.

## Bad metaphors make teaching harder

When talking about programming, I pick on git because the metaphors I've heard during explanations of different git commands tend to be convoluted — often making an explanation far harder to understand than the underlying concept. Teaching the concept of rebasing code in git, for instance, can include metaphors like time travel, tree grafting, and meat cleavers. That last one is my least favorite, but is quite popular, as shown in [“Intro to Rebase”](#) on [GitReady.com](#):

Thanks to Travis Swicegood, we have a better metaphor: A cleaver. Rebase helps to cut up commits and slice them into any way that you want them served up, and placed exactly where you want them. You can actually rewrite history with this command, be it reordering commits, squashing them into bigger ones, or completely ignoring them if you so desire.

If you haven't had much occasion to use rebase, that metaphor sounds easy enough to understand: you chop up the order in which you made changes to a particular code base. But the metaphor breaks down quickly once you get into what git rebase really does. (The meat cleaver metaphor also doesn't seem to be a big hit with vegetarians.) I feel like a few people heard this metaphor and ran with it without asking for a lot of feedback on how their audiences responded to the concept of the meat cleaver.

In the git documentation, git rebase is defined as “Forward-port local commits to the updated upstream head.” That definition is about as clear as mud. It's hard to do much better without resorting to metaphors and examples. For our purposes here, though, we can work with a basic definition: git rebase rolls back changes we've made to a code base and then reapplies those changes in a new order. Leave the exact details for another day.

With that definition, we can easily see how weak the cleaver metaphor is. As well as taking apart the order in which changes are applied to a code base, rebase also lets us reapply those changes in another order — when you take a cleaver to a piece of meat, though, putting the resulting pieces together again later is no simple matter. While “meat glue” exists (there's an enzyme named transglutaminase that can form bonds between protein), it's an obscure and gross reference that stretches the metaphor into “well, actually” territory.

## Naming conventions shouldn't be metaphorical

The problem of unclear metaphors goes deeper than describing programming's key ideas to newcomers — it's not just a matter of complex explanations. Git is a mish-mash of bad metaphors long before you get to the underlying concepts. Git's commands read like a list of metaphors for the work each command is supposed to perform:

- fetch
- cherry-pick
- pull from upstream

These commands, taken out of the context of version control, conjure up mental images of dogs and bones, selecting good fruit, and even fishing. While knowing the idioms preferred by git's core contributors isn't necessary to use it, that knowledge certainly helps. Not knowing the underlying metaphors or context for these commands makes learning them just a bit more difficult.



We're never going to have commands (or other naming schemes, for that matter) that are completely without metaphorical meaning — in fact, making up completely new terms would require using nonsense words. But we can do better in terms of choosing the subtle metaphors that go along with naming individual commands. For those of us who are creating tools we expect other programmers to work with, we need to pay attention to the other types of knowledge we're subtly referencing. If you're starting from scratch in developing your naming scheme, spend some time on the matter. Just being aware enough of your naming scheme to stick to a connected set of metaphors, rather than mixing fishing and fruit harvests, can be enough to make a tool more accessible.

Some communities have established naming schemes, of course. In Python, you're going to see bundles that are called “eggs” that you get from the “Cheese Shop.” You're not going to be able to rename anything that doesn't make sense if there's already a well-established set of metaphors in place (even if the naming convention doesn't make sense to learners just joining your community). In those cases, stick to naming conventions and keep your alternative metaphors in documentation and other materials outside the code itself (no matter how much better your metaphor might be). Do the same with your *Monty Python* references, if only so we're all in on the joke.

For those of us who don't feel advanced enough to release tools to our fellow programmers, there is still plenty of work to do. Finding new metaphors to describe Git's more complex commands (as well as other programming concepts) and sharing them with our peers is crucial. Give talks, write blog posts, even annotate existing tutorials to make them useful to anyone with a similar background to your own.

Need a place to get started? Write up a response to a programming metaphor you hate. You don't have to publish it, but you can share your feedback with the people publishing those metaphors.

Sharing your own metaphors doesn't have to be complicated: the only reason I really understand how an algorithm works conceptually is because a friend gave a short talk at a user group several years ago, walking through soufflé recipes as algorithms. That mindset has stuck with me for years and I've used it in articles, as well as to explain individual algorithms in meetings and

discussions. That's because I cook, even if I don't make soufflés all that often — that shared experience means that the recipe metaphor made sense immediately to me.

## Metaphors reflect our culture and our experiences

These sorts of metaphors don't just make learning new concepts harder, though. They can wind up dictating the culture that we see every day in the software industry.

Katie Lane, a lawyer specializing in negotiation, dealt with software vendors who didn't think very carefully about the metaphors they used during sales meetings. She says, "Software sales guys always used 'open the kimono' for 'let me tell you what's really going on.'" As far as metaphors go for revealing information, asking someone to 'open their kimono' and metaphorically show off their underwear is creepy. Lane did find a way to educate those software vendors with a metaphor of her own: "I started using 'unzip the fly' in retaliation. They usually stopped after that."

When a metaphor becomes common, people use it unthinkingly. A useful metaphor provides a cognitive shortcut, something that a vendor, an educator, or anyone who routinely finds themselves explaining tricky concepts needs desperately. But we need to carefully consider the metaphors we use, both in terms of whether a listener will get the metaphor but also if there are going to be negative connotations for that listener. Customizing explanations to individual audiences is a big part of being an effective software vendor (including promoting open source projects). The same holds true for writing documentation and tutorials. Think about your audience's experiences, as well as your own.

Through my own experiences, I've found metaphors that help me illustrate concepts in a way that I (and people who have had some similar experiences) can grasp more easily. Return to the concept of git rebase for a moment: while meat cleavers and tree grafting don't provide me with a clear view of how rebase works, the idea of a seam ripper does. A seam ripper takes apart a piece of clothing without destroying the fabric so that you can put those pieces back together slightly differently — maybe cutting down the fabric a little to tailor clothing, maybe just to re-sew a seam that's crooked, or maybe to take apart a piece of clothing and turn it into a quilt.

Of course, my metaphor requires knowing what a seam ripper is. It comes from a specific set of knowledge that I can draw comparisons to. There aren't a lot of universal sets of knowledge. I've heard suggestions that we could talk about git rebase in terms of a sandwich: you can take off cheese or lettuce off a sandwich, reorder the ingredients, or even cut it in half without violating its inherent sandwichiness. In much the same way, you can remove or reorder commits to a code repository using git rebase. It's not a perfect metaphor, but a sandwich may be clearer to many users than a seam ripper. Cooking and eating are closer to universal concepts, but those areas of knowledge just reinforce our need to explore what metaphors we use and to test how effectively they work.

## Beta testing a programming metaphor

Building better metaphors into how we talk about programming, as well as how we teach concepts and name tools, has never been more necessary. More and more people are learning to code — or at least trying to, until a key concept seems impossible to understand. Code schools, online courses, and even elementary schools are introducing learners to programming. While the reach of these educational opportunities is impressive, many of the educators responsible for teaching programming to wide audiences are still relying on the metaphors that worked for a group of students in a college-level computer science course or for a self-taught hacker able to sink in hours of programming practice every night.

I'm not saying that there isn't room for car metaphors or even comparisons that rely on unfortunate meat cleaver references. But we need a lot more metaphors sprouting from a much wider variety of experiences. We need comparisons to cooking, rap, Lego, and a million other things.

And we need feedback on the metaphors we're putting out in the world. We need to beta test the way we make explanations: asking people with different backgrounds from your own is the only way to know whether an explanation is accessible. Unless you happen to be a mind reader, asking is the only way to find out the value of a given metaphor. After all, there's no other way to find out whether someone else has any experience with cooking, car repair, or whatever else you might use as the basis for a metaphor.



# IDENTITY CONSIDERATIONS IN REFERENCE DOCUMENTATION

— Lyzi Diamond

All writing has room for bias, but most definitions of “reference documentation” make no mention of it. According to these definitions, reference documentation should not contain metaphors or flowery language, which makes it less susceptible to word choice. Documentation is direct, to-the-point, clear, and concise. These are the docs that provide a single answer, a discrete path forward, and a comprehensive list of available options. This is the last place we should have to worry about bias and identity questions, right?

Ironically, approaching reference documentation as a medium free from bias can actually allow gendered, normative, and sometimes offensive language to find its way into your docs. And the stakes here are high — if a user stumbles over your documentation due to some of these small decisions, that’s one fewer user for your product. When working on reference documentation, ask yourself the following questions to make sure you’re on the right track.

1. What do I know?
2. What am I assuming?
3. What am I wrong about?
4. What am I forgetting?

## 1. What do I know?

Our own ideas of correctness stem directly from our tendencies and preferences. The way you think about a product is likely the same way you will want to talk about it and write about it. But you are not the target audience for your documentation, and your own preference for how to think about the product you’re documenting may not be the best way for a beginner to understand it — especially if that beginner is used to learning in different ways than you are.

In “[Avoid These Technical Writing Mistakes](#)” (*Chemical Engineering Progress*, June 1998), Robert W. Bly from The Center for Technical Communication offers that the most common writing problem in technical documentation is poor organization. He writes, “Before you write, plan. Create a rough outline that spells out the contents and organization of your paper or report.” While the article provides

guidance on how to organize a wide range of technical documents, a few standards are directly related to reference documentation:

- alphabetical order
- grouping by function (literal or figurative)
- order based on difficulty
- order based on chronology
- deductive order

When writing a reference for a library or API, use alphabetical order or group by functionality. When documenting a visual software tool with a user interface, group by functionality and order each task based on difficulty. Deductive order (from more general to more specific) can be useful when describing how a user might approach a tool, but is less useful for reference.

Good example: Twitter’s [REST API documentation](#) groups endpoints by request method: all the GET requests together, then the POST requests, then the DELETE requests. Within each of these categories, the endpoints are organized alphabetically. This makes it easy to find the piece you’re looking for.

Not-so-good example: Google’s [Cloud Platform reference](#) organizes its sub-tools based on functionality, but the tools underneath each heading are not in any discernible order. A few sentences at the top of the page about how a user should navigate the documentation, as well as decide which product is best for them to use would go a long way to increasing understanding and, ultimately, adoption.

## 2. What am I assuming?

Like most writing, making incorrect or flippant assumptions about your user is a sure way to marginalize them with your documentation. When writing or reviewing technical writing, check these assumptions and make sure you’re making informed guesses about what your users are expecting. Common assumptions include:

### **THE USER IS COMFORTABLE WITH THE PRONOUNS YOU USE.**

Commonly, documentation and instructions use the pronouns “he” and “him” to refer to the user. This can be disenfranchising for a user who does not use those pronouns, and may cause the user to assume (consciously or subconsciously) that the documentation

was not written for them. Avoid pronouns whenever possible, and if you do have to use them, opt for the gender-neutral “they.”

### **THE USER HAS ALL THE NECESSARY INFORMATION TO START USING YOUR PRODUCT RIGHT AWAY.**

If a user is encountering your product for the first time, they may not already know everything they need to know to use the tool effectively. If at all possible, include a “How to read this documentation” or “What you need to know” section to let users know what you expect them to be able to do.

### **THE USER WILL READ THE DOCUMENTATION TOP-TO-BOTTOM.**

Most users will not read your reference documentation from top to bottom — rather, they will find the section that is relevant to them and read it. This means that if you define some terminology at the start of your documentation and use the terms in a later section, you cannot be sure that the user will have seen it.

### **THE USER WANTS TO KNOW HOW OR WHY SOMETHING WORKS, ESPECIALLY IN DETAIL.**

While it’s good to provide detailed process descriptions, users often seek reference documentation to answer specific questions. Make sure your reference documentation includes enough information to understand the concept or section of the product you’re describing, but not so much that it overwhelms the user.

### **THE USER’S FIRST LANGUAGE IS ENGLISH.**

Even if your user base is centered around a specific geographic area, always assume that your documentation is being read by a non-native speaker. Avoid using idioms, awkward sentence phrasing, and strange tenses. Use second-person imperative (“command” tense) whenever possible, and try to test your documentation with a non-native speaker before you release it.

### **THE USER CAN READ THE DOCUMENTATION.**

Some of your users will require web accessibility tools to engage with your documentation, so make sure whatever system you’re using for your documentation is compatible with common accessibility tools. The [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) has a list of common tools you can test websites and content against.

Good example: The [Leaflet.js documentation](#) defines the central class of the API first (Map), and then every subsequent mention of Map links

back to that initial definition. This allows the user to start at any point in the documentation and understand the terms used.

### 3. What am I wrong about?

All writing needs an editor to look for mistakes, but there are a few specific problems commonly found in reference documentation that are relatively easy to avoid.

#### **INCONSISTENCY IN VOICE.**

Often, reference documentation is compiled from several writers who are experts in their area. The more writers you have, the more different voices, turns of phrase, and vocabulary you're going to see. In order to make your documentation seamless for the user, go through and edit the whole document to make sure it comes from a singular voice.

#### **INCONSISTENCY IN VOCABULARY.**

While you may refer to a feature by several different names internally, make sure your documentation follows the golden vocabulary rule: anything you release should have exactly one name. Every unique name in your documentation should refer to a unique feature.

#### **INCORRECT, INCOMPLETE, OR OUTDATED.**

For many teams, documentation comes at the very end of the process and is at the bottom of the priority list. Unfortunately, this leads to documentation that is often incomplete, incorrect, and outdated. Make sure everything in your documentation is true as a user would experience it, from error messages to buttons and everything in-between.

### 4. What am I forgetting?

Every product has its own documentation needs, and part of the job of writing reference documentation is determining what your users need most out of your documentation. Consider the whole range of your user base — what do they need in order to be successful? Is your documentation providing that? If not, what are you going to do to fix it?

One important element at the end of your documentation process is testing. Testing your documentation means checking for everything listed above, but also putting your documentation in front of a



variety of different users and observing how they interact with it. Think about the broad range of users who may rely on your documentation and select testers from diverse backgrounds.

It is important to keep this process going throughout the life of your product. Documentation should be updated frequently to better serve the needs of your users and to stay up-to-date with new releases and changes. Be sure to ask yourself the above questions every time you make those updates. Your users will thank you!



# WRITING ABOUT TRANSITION OF INDIVIDUALS

— DASH BUCK

A transgender person is not their transition just as a person with a disability is not their condition. If their transition is irrelevant to your story, don't include details about it.

Mentioning that someone is trans is different from discussing their transition. The former acknowledges their identity; the latter puts a focus on their history. The former is appropriate if they are out about being trans; the latter is only appropriate in some circumstances.

## Respect Their Privacy

It may be inappropriate to discuss your subject's transition for personal reasons. Transition is often a private matter. A person may leave one community and join another where their previous name or pronoun is not known. Deciding if or when to explain their past is a personal choice. Do not discuss someone's trans identity or their transition without their consent. If you can't get consent — for example, if your subject is deceased — avoid discussing their transition. Mentioning their trans identity may be appropriate if they had been out about it at the end of their life.

Being out is not a binary state. A person who is out about their transition in one context may not be out in others. Someone who has transitioned at work may not be out to their parents, or vice versa. Consider the context of your publication before choosing to cover this topic. The consequences of outing someone who has transitioned can be dire for them and their community. Physical violence, emotional harm, and loss of livelihood are common outcomes. Be sure to take the utmost care when handling this topic.

If a person's transition is not relevant to your topic, don't discuss it in detail. Simply use the pronouns and name they use now.

## Don't Make It Weird

Trans people have been traditionally depicted as objects of curiosity in both news articles and fiction. There have been many articles and

stories written about transition. You probably don't have anything new to share, especially if you aren't transgender yourself.

Avoid framing your interviewee as a unicorn. People change their names all the time for all sorts of reasons: marriage, ease of use, and even professional branding are all common. Millions of people have changed which pronouns they use over the course of their lives. Transitioning is a normal part of human existence even if it's unusual to you personally; treat it as such.

Take care with the headline. If your subject's trans identity isn't central to your story, it doesn't belong in the title hook.

## Writing About Transition Respectfully

- Do not discuss someone's transition or reveal their trans identity without their consent.
- Make sure that a discussion of their transition is relevant to your topic. Does it make sense if you remove the details about transition? If so, remove them.
- Don't center your article on the transition story. Instead, use transition details to support the more important themes.
- Always use the name and pronouns your subject uses now even if discussing events in the past.
- Don't juxtapose pre-transition and post-transition images. Consider carefully before including pre-transition images.
- Don't emphasize your interviewee's gender presentation or lack thereof. Avoid images of the interviewee doing activities related to their gender presentation.
- Don't include medical details about someone's transition or lack thereof unless they are undeniably relevant to the topic.

## A Good Example

Gabrielle Birkner's article for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Jewish transgender man gives birth and embraces life as a single 'abba.'" is an excellent example of this. The article shares Rafi Daugherty's experiences giving birth to his child, Ettie, and manages to focus on his parenting while also sharing his experience of pregnancy:

- Rafi is out as trans in the Jewish community, which is the audience for whom this article is intended.
- Rafi's experiences of transitioning are included since it is relevant to the story.
- Rafi's yearning for and joy in parenthood inside of his community is the central theme of this article. Details about his rejection by his previous community during his transition supports this theme.
- Rafi's current name and pronouns are used throughout even when talking about his childhood.
- While pre-transition images are used, they are captioned with the correct pronouns and are not placed next to Rafi's present-day photographs.
- Rafi is shown interacting with his child during a Jewish ceremony, which is relevant to the central topic.
- Medical details about Rafi's transition are shared, but they are directly relevant to the story, mentioned in a short paragraph, and framed inside of the central theme.

## Interviewing Transgender Individuals

### **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

Use your interviewee's chosen pronouns and current name when speaking to others, even (or especially) if that is against policy. Practice when you're alone to make this into a smooth habit.

Carefully consider whether you will cover your interviewee's transition in your piece. If this piece of experience is vital to your topic, check in with your interviewee beforehand. Ensure they're prepared to discuss it with you, and explain your planned framing of your article, if possible. This will allow your interviewee to give informed consent. Your interviewee may be unable to give informed consent, if they are a minor for example. In cases like this, you may need to use your publication's policy for guidance.

Manage your fascination. Transition is normal, maybe even boring, to your interviewee. Spend some time with Google to assuage your curiosity about transition specifically and gender in general before the interview. This will allow you to stay on topic.

### **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

Treat your interviewee as a person, not a spectacle. Focus on their accomplishments instead of their gender, presentation, or transition “journey.”

Never assume that you know a person's pronouns or how to spell their name. Always ask. Better to be embarrassed now than be incredibly embarrassed and offensive later.

Follow your interviewee's lead when discussing their past. Some people who have changed their name may talk about their past in third person. Others may prefer to not mention their previous name. Some people are uncomfortable about topics around their transition; others are proud. Each person's transition and relationship to their past is valid and worthy of respect.

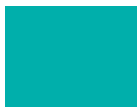
Do not ask about medical topics. Anything that your interviewee may need to discuss with a doctor is off limits. Those that transition are regularly asked rude or naïve questions about their medical history. Demonstrate professional courtesy and respect toward your interviewee by avoiding these topics. If you are curious about medical transition, there are many resources available. There is no need to be yet another curious bystander asking inappropriate questions.

You may decide after careful consideration that the medical experience of your interviewee is vital to your piece. If so, the best practice is to find an interviewer with similar lived experience to create the piece. This will allow you to avoid privileged missteps.

You may want to assure your subject that you are “one of the good ones.” Don’t tell them about how much you accept them. Don’t explain your views on gender. Instead, treat them as a normal person with an interesting story. Your respect of them and their identity will show through your actions.

## In Conclusion

When you write about transgender individuals — and you should — treat them as a whole person. Look at transition as a trivia fact about your subject. It’s a point of interest on the same level as “used to live in Iowa” or “has a bachelor’s degree in Art History.” Take it into account, then set it aside. There’s almost certainly a more interesting story for you to tell.





# INTERSECTIONALITY

In order to discuss identity, we need to discuss the ways that both individuals and communities identify themselves. We also need to discuss the ways that different identities intersect and interact. The concept of intersectionality gives us a framework for those discussions.

Kimberlé Crenshaw originated the term “intersectionality” as part of her work in critical race theory, as a way to conceptualize the overlapping identities we each experience. Race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities can combine in ways that are hard to consider without having life experience, but an intersectional lens can help us research and write about different facets of identity more effectively.

In this section, you’ll find terminology for applying an intersectional perspective in your writing.

— *Thursday Bram, Stephanie Morillo, Heidi Waterhouse, and Melissa Chavez*

## **active voice**

Because passive voice sentence structures can maximize unconscious bias, use the active voice wherever possible. See also **passive voice**.

## **ally**

An ally is a person who acknowledges the oppressions faced by people from different backgrounds. An ally is committed to taking action (and associated risks) on the behalf of others, as well as to dismantling systems of institutional oppression.

## **amplification**

A technique an ally can use to boost the message of another person. Amplification can be as simple as repeating something another person said and giving them full credit.

## **civil rights**

A civil right is granted by a legal or governing body. For instance, in the U.S., citizens are granted civil rights through the U.S. Constitution (as state constitutions, legal rulings, and legislation). See also **human rights**.

### **code of conduct**

A code of conduct is a set of guidelines issued by a community outlining acceptable and unacceptable behavior within that community. Some codes of conduct are developed as part of an organizational governance process. A code of conduct may be issued for a temporary community, such as attendees of a given event.

### **content warning**

Content warnings are notices shared before other content, to point out any material that members of the audience may find difficult. Content warnings can be used to prepare audiences for strobing lights (like warnings for people with photosensitive epilepsy) or for discussions of violence (like warnings for people experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder). The term “content warning” is preferred over “trigger warning.” Examples of established content warnings include the Motion Picture Association of America’s film rating system, based on suitability for specific audiences. See also **trigger**.

### **cultural appropriation**

The adoption or repurposing of cultural elements from a marginalized group by a dominant group. Often, this takes place in a space with little sensitivity to original historical context or a genuine understanding of the traditions being repurposed. They may also rely on stereotypes, and are sometimes repurposed for personal or financial gain.

Examples of cultural appropriation can include wearing sacred headdresses from a **Native American** tribe during a football game, or a major restaurant chain employing AAVE (African American Vernacular English) in tweets promoting a new product.

### **culture fit**

An employee’s culture fit represents their ability to conform to the core values and social norms of an organization. Because culture fit can be used to avoid hiring or to fire workers from underrepresented background, avoid making judgements based on culture fit. Many companies are currently experimenting with other ways of evaluating employees’ comfort within organizational culture. At Buffer, for instance, the company examines employees’ “cultural contributions” and “values fit.”

## **diversity**

Broadly, diversity covers any range of different things. In business and technical conversations, diversity is used to describe the need for multiple perspectives, as well as the efforts made to meet that need. Contextualize the term “diversity” when you use it and remember that a group of **White women** isn’t necessarily any more diverse on its own than a group of **White men** is.

## **equal employment opportunity or EEO**

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established protections for U.S. employees against discrimination based on an applicant or employee’s **race**, color, **religion**, **sex**, or national origin. The term “equal employment opportunity” is used to describe equal access to employment described under the Civil Rights Act. This term is commonly used in job listings.

## **equity**

Equity is the expected condition one would experience if certain demographic factors hadn’t influenced that person’s life. Achieving equity requires elimination of systematic injustices, including policies, cultural messages, and attitudes that lead to inequality.

## **essentialism**

Essentialism is the concept that every group has fixed traits, ignoring variation between group members. In **gender** essentialism, for instance, **women** are assumed to have certain characteristics deemed exclusively feminine. Essentialism should be avoided, due to the numerous sociological studies that demonstrate the social construction of identity, such as **gender**, **sexuality**, or **race**.

## **feminism**

As Marie Shear wrote in 1986, “Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.” Feminism is a range of political and social movements that seek equality for all people, regardless of **gender**. Feminists routinely work for **gender equality** for people who are not **women**, because gender inequality harms **men** and people who are **nonbinary**.

## **freedom of speech**

Listed as a **human right** in the U.N.’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, freedom of speech refers the right to share one’s ideas and opinion without government retaliation or censorship. However, the right to freedom of speech does not eliminate other people’s right to life, safety, and not listening to opinions or ideas that are irrelevant.

## **human rights**

A human right is a fundamental right (such as the right to life). While **civil rights** often guarantee human rights, but human rights are generally seen as fundamental rights all people should have access to, no matter the government they live under. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948, as well as additional documents, that have evolved into international law governing human rights. See also **civil rights**.

## **identity subdivisions**

See **self identity**.

## **implicit bias**

Refers to the unconscious and unintentional attitudes or stereotypes a person has towards people based on specific characteristics, such as **race**. Studies show that, while automatic, implicit bias is malleable and can be unlearned gradually.

Example: “The Recruiting team underwent a series of unconscious bias trainings to help them identify implicit biases in hiring and pinpoint places where they can move qualified candidates of color further along the pipeline.”

## **inclusivity**

Inclusivity is an intention of including people who might otherwise be excluded. Inclusion takes diversity a step further by creating an environment that encourages belonging, full participation, and equal access to opportunities for all of its members.

## **intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a sociological concept that studies the impact that various, overlapping identities — **race**, **gender**, class, **sexual orientation**, etc. — have on how an individual experiences discrimination and disenfranchisement. It was first coined and described by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in response to the exclusion of **Black women** from the mainstream **feminist** and **civil rights** movements.

## **lower the bar**

You may hear the phrase “lower the bar” in descriptions of how companies recruit for **diversity**. It’s based on the incorrect concept that, in order to find diverse candidates, companies must hire people who might not otherwise meet their standards. In most

cases, however, an examination of a company's hiring practices find that those practices are removing highly qualified candidates from consideration, especially those who come from different backgrounds than a company's existing team. Avoid using this term.

### **meritocracy**

Many organizations describe themselves as meritocracies, based on an assumption that hard work and skill are the only characteristics necessary for success. However, true meritocracies are extremely rare: structural oppression, **implicit bias**, and differing levels of **privilege** mean that people with differing backgrounds will have very different chances of achieving success. Avoid using this term.

### **minorities**

Avoid when possible. While “minority” continues to be a traditionally acceptable term for people of color, current usage has conflated it to include other **underrepresented groups**. However, due to ongoing demographic shifts in the U.S., “minority” is increasingly becoming an inaccurate term to use for **people of color**. It also carries a negative connotation, implying inferior. See **people of color**.

Avoid: Using “minority” or “minorities” without other descriptors for specific groups (e.g., “ethnic minority/ies”, “racial minority/ies”). Don't use it as a term for individuals (e.g., “Jasmine and Joel are the only minorities on the Marketing team,” or “I'm a minority engineer.”).

### **passive voice**

Avoid using the passive voice. Especially when discussing negative news or problems, passive sentence structures minimize responsibility and can limit your ability to tell a full story. You can test a sentence's passivity by adding the phrase “by sloths” to the end. If the sentence makes sense, it's passive: “There is a considerable range of cuteness displayed by sloths.” It's also clunky writing. Try this active version instead: “Sloths display a considerable range of cuteness.” See also **active voice**.

### **people-first language**

People-first language is an approach to writing that emphasizes the humanity or personhood of the people you write about. However, some communities prefer to hold and reclaim social identities. Consider both your audience and the people you're writing about when deciding whether to use people-first language. See also **identity-first language**.

## **privilege**

Privilege is access to rights, advantages, and systemic support that are only available some people, usually because of membership in a social group. **White privilege** is one type of privilege. Becoming aware of your own privilege should not be a process of taking on guilt; instead, acknowledging privilege is an opportunity to help build a more inclusive world.

## **self identity**

A person's self identity is a collection of beliefs that person holds about themselves, including facets of their identity like **gender identity**, sexual identity, and racial identity. Using a person's description of themselves is crucial: categorization and labelling are key tools used to maintain systemic injustice. If you aren't sure how a person self-identifies, ask.

## **social justice**

Social justice is the just and fair relationship between an individual and society. Social justice activists work towards equal distribution of opportunity and wealth, including through the creation of safety nets and breaking of barriers to social mobility. Avoid using terms meant to ascribe negative connotations to social justice or social justice activists, such as "social justice warrior."

## **tokenism**

Including members of **underrepresented groups** in a team or company puts a burden on those people to represent all members of their **underrepresented groups**. Tokenism is a particularly pernicious tool of institutional oppression.

## **unconscious bias**

See **implicit bias**.

## **underrepresented groups**

A collective term for groups of people with an identity not widely represented or recognized in the workplace, government, media, etc. These include (but are not limited to) people of color, people with disabilities, **LGBTQIA** people, religious **minority** groups (including **Muslims** in the U.S.), **women** (depending on context), etc.

Avoid: Substituting with the singular term minority/ies. See **minority**.

Example: “This year, we’re offering diversity scholarships for members of underrepresented groups. If you’re interested in applying, fill out the form below.”

**underindexed groups**

A newer alternative to the term “**underrepresented groups**,” describing groups as underindexed allows you to indicate a lack of recognition for that group, rather than a lack of participation.





# RACE

Important things to keep in mind when writing about race:

- Only mention a person or group's race or ethnicity when relevant, and never use derogatory terms or slurs.
- Always allow people to self identify, and go with a term that aligns with a person's identity. For example, if someone would prefer to be identified by their tribal affiliations rather than "Native American," use that instead.
- Be specific whenever possible. Identifying people by tribe, region, or country, of origin is preferable to using broader, collective terms. "People of color" is a collective term for all non-White racial groups; it is not meant to be used as an alternative for just one group (e.g., using "people of color" instead of "Black Americans"). If you're writing about Central Americans, for example, do not use "Latinos."
- Avoid appropriating words and imagery from different cultural groups to illustrate a concept. For example: using "ninja" instead of "programmer," or "pow-wow" instead of "meeting" or "stand-up."

— Stephanie Morillo

## Alaska Native

Collective term for indigenous Alaskans. They are culturally distinct from **Native Americans**. Avoid: "Eskimo." Instead, use — and capitalize — names of tribes, e.g., Iñupiat, Tlingit, Aleut.

Example: "We're conducting research in the hopes of designing a distance learning program that will increase the representation of young Alaska Natives in technology."

## **African American**

When used as a noun, African American does not take a hyphen. African American and **Black** are not synonymous terms. See also **Black**.

## **Asian American**

A broad term for people of Asian descent and Asian immigrants to the U.S. When used as a noun, it does not take a hyphen. Specify groups whenever possible, such as Indonesian American or Thai American.

Example: “Five Asian-American high school students founded a mobile payments startup to facilitate business transactions in rural Central Asian communities.”

## **AANHPI**

The acronym for “Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander.” Write out the term for the first reference. As AANHPI is inclusive of **Native Hawaiians**, it is not interchangeable with **AAPI** nor **Asian American**.

## **AAPI**

The acronym for “Asian American and Pacific Islander”. Write out the term for the first reference. As AAPI is a term that includes Pacific Islanders, it is not shorthand for **Asian American**, but is a more inclusive term.

Example: “The organization has raised over \$5 million in scholarships for college-bound AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) students.”

## **biracial**

Term for a person with ancestry of two or more **rac**es. See also **multiracial**.

## **Black (racial category)**

The preferred collective term for **African Americans** and people from Black immigrant communities. Black is a proper noun and should be capitalized. Avoid pejorative phrasing, such as “a Black” or “the Blacks”.

Example: “Black STEM majors comprised a record 15% of this year’s graduating class.”

## **blacklist**

Use terms like blacklist and whitelist with caution. Due to the negative and positive characteristics attributed to “black” and “white,” consider using alternative terms with neutral connotations. Examples include:

- Block list / safe list
- Allow list / deny list

## **code-switching**

The practice of moving between two languages or between dialects of the same language depending on the context. One example of code switching exists when **Black** AAVE (African American Vernacular English) speakers switch to Standard American English in the presence of **White** people or non-AAVE speaking **people of color**. This occurs most frequently in spoken conversation.

## **colorblind**

The practice of disregarding or overlooking racial characteristics or racial categories. This philosophy is employed with the goal of ending **racist** practices, but it ends up hurting **people of color** when race isn’t considered as a ground for hiring, harassment, etc. It views **race**, and not the way someone is treated based on **race**, as the problem. For the medical diagnosis, see **color blind**.

## **communities of color**

Acceptable umbrella term for communities anywhere where a majority of residents are **people of color** (of any **race** or **ethnic** group).

Example: “Programs are emerging in communities of color to teach and mentor the next generation of computer scientists and engineers.”

## **death march**

Avoid. In software, death march refers to poorly planned projects that are destined to fail. The term death march, however, was coined by prisoners in Nazi concentration camps for the forced marches of prisoners of war over long distances, with the intent to displace, torture, or kill. Attempted genocides other than the **Holocaust** have included death marches, such as the Cherokee Trail of Tears, as have war crimes, such as the Bataan Death March.

## **Eskimo**

See **Alaska Native**.

### **ethnicity**

A grouping of people who identify with one another based on geography, culture, or national or linguistic heritage. **Race** and ethnicity can overlap, but are not synonymous—ethnicity is based on cultural similarities, while **race** is based on presumed genetic similarities (e.g., there is the pan-ethnic **Latino** category, while individual Latinos can be of any race). See **race**. Avoid: Using pejorative variations like “ethnics,” “ethnic people.”

### **foreign national**

Preferred term for people from a different country visiting or residing in the U.S.

Avoid: “aliens.” And use caution with “foreigners.”

### **ghetto**

Avoid terms that refer to sections of cities inhabited by **people of color**, primarily **Blacks** and **Latinos**, like ghetto and inner city. They are pejorative due to negative, racialized connotations. See also **communities of color**.

Avoid: Using “ghetto” to mean hacking something together quickly or with few resources, e.g. “My computer setup is so ghetto.”

Do: Use specific section, region, or neighborhood names instead, e.g. “The organization teaches kids in the South Bronx, Jamaica, Brownsville, and East New York neighborhoods how to code.”

### **gypsy**

Avoid. See **Roma**.

### **Hispanic**

A broad term for people with ancestry from Spanish-speaking Latin American countries. Also an ethnic category on the U.S. Census. Hispanics can be of any race. See **Latino**.

### **India**

A country in South Asia. Its citizens are called Indians (not to be confused with Native Americans — see **Native American**). Americans of Indian descent are known as Indian Americans.

### **inner city**

See ghetto.

## **Latino**

Preferred umbrella term for people of Latin-American ancestry. While primarily used for people with ties to Spanish-speaking Latin-American countries, people with ancestry from French- and Portuguese-speaking countries and territories in the region are also Latinos. Latino is a pan-ethnic category, and as such, Latinos are of any race.

The feminine variant is “Latina,” and the masculine is “Latino.” Singular “Latino,” pluralized “Latinos.” Many young Latinos employ constructions such as “Latinx/Latinxs,” “Latines,” “Latin@s,” or “Latino/a | Latinos/as” online when referring to themselves. While generally OK to use on social media, use “Latinos” or “Latinos/as” when in doubt. Use “U.S. Latinos” if referring to Latinos from the U.S.

Avoid: Using “Latins” or “the Latins.” **Hispanic** and Latino are not synonymous.

Example: “As a result of new mentorship programs, Latino students in the area are twice as likely to take — and pass — the AP Computer Science exam today than they were three years ago.”

## **master / slave**

Avoid. While many systems still employ this terminology, consider using the alternative “primary / replica.” (Drupal and Django both use the terms “primary / replica.”)

## **MENA**

Acronym for “Middle East and North Africa.” The U.S. Census Bureau has announced that the 2020 U.S. Census will include a MENA category for the first time.

## **microaggressions**

Microaggressions are behaviors or statements in everyday interactions that stem from racial bias. While often unintentional, microaggressions are nevertheless demeaning to **people of color**.

Examples of microaggressions include asking someone how they learned to speak English so well, telling someone they are very articulate for someone from their racial group, or crossing the opposite side of the street to avoid people from a specific racial group.

## **multiracial**

A term for people with ancestry of two or more **races**. Avoid: “mixed,” “mutt,” “mulatto.”

Example: “Multiracial Americans are one of the largest growing segments of the overall population.”

## **Native American**

Acceptable collective term for indigenous Americans, also known as American Indians. They are distinct from **Alaska Natives**, **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders**, Indians, Indian Americans (see **India**). Avoid: “Indian” and pejorative terms like “red” or “redskins.”

Use specific tribal names whenever possible and capitalize the names of tribes, e.g., Navajo, Choctaw, Sioux. Similarly, when describing a Native American’s **religion**, use specific tribal affiliation whenever possible. Take additional care when discussing Native American religious identities: because Native American religions relied heavily on oral traditions, Eurocentric scholars argued against classifying Native American religions as religion. Shamans and medicine healers serve as religious leaders in some tribes, but do not assume that every Native American religion is the same. Avoid culturally appropriating terms or concepts from Native American religions.

Sentence: “In line with our commitment to grow our technical staff of color in the coming year, we’re on track to hire our company’s first Native American software developers, product managers, and product designers.”

## **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders**

A term used in the U.S. Census for people with ancestry in Hawaii or the South Pacific, including Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. Not to be confused with **Asian American**.

Sentence: “Our mission is to increase the number of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander Americans in tech through free coding immersion programs.”

## **ninja**

Avoid. An appropriated term used in software development culture for an adept programmer, or to refer to specific coding and working styles. Do not use the term or associated imagery outside of its

appropriate context (i.e., in a discussion on the history of ninjas in Japan).

### **people of color**

Preferred collective term for all non-**White** racial groups. Avoid terms like “colored”, “ethnics”, “ethnic people”. People of color is not synonymous with **Black**. Identify people with their own ethnic and racial groups or regions of origin, e.g., “**Native Americans**,” “**Latinos**,” “South Asians”, “West Africans”, “Arab Americans”).

Example: “Collectively, people of color make up 25 percent of the company’s engineering organization.”

### **permanent resident**

A foreign national that has been authorized to live and work in the U.S. Avoid: “green-card holder” or “resident alien.”

Example: “U.S. citizens and permanent residents do not require employer sponsorship to work in U.S.-based firms.”

### **POC or PoC**

An acronym for **people of color**, not to be confused with “proof of concept.” Write out the term for the first reference. See **people of color**.

### **pow-wow**

A social gathering or ceremony in different **Native American** communities. Also written as powwow.

Avoid: Using outside of a **Native American** context (e.g., calling a team offsite or retreat a “pow-wow”).

### **race**

Socially constructed groupings, or races, are traditionally based on presumed shared physical or genetic characteristics. While race does not have a biological basis — it’s been shown that there isn’t a discernible trait or characteristic that differentiates one race from another — the impact of race on policy, social institutions, and ability to access opportunities and resources is real.

Avoid: Mentioning a person’s — or group’s — race if it isn’t relevant. Don’t use derogatory terms or slurs when writing about race.

See **ethnicity**, **racism**, and **white privilege**.

**racism**

Discrimination or prejudice against people based on **race** or **ethnicity**. Additionally, a belief that every racial and ethnic group differs in abilities which determines the achievements and outcomes of people within those groups. Racism exists on an individual and structural level. It shapes both individual perceptions and interactions with people of different backgrounds, as well as institutions, policies, and mainstream culture.

See **unconscious bias**, **microaggression**, and **White privilege**.

**Roma**

A traditionally nomadic ethnic group, the Roma are found all over the world. Check how a Romani person wishes to be identified. Avoid using slurs like “gypsy,” which are not only inaccurate but may also carry connotations of illegality. Do not assume that if a person is Roma that they are also nomadic or conform to other stereotypes.

**samurai**

Avoid. See **ninja**.

**slave**

Avoid. See **master** / **slave**.

**undocumented immigrant**

A person that does not possess documents authorizing them to live or work in the U.S. It is the preferred term for immigrants without documentation.

Avoid: “illegal immigrant,” “illegal alien,” or “illegals.”

Example: “Our organization is committed to helping undocumented students fund their university education and helping them find gainful employment in the tech industry.”

**White**

A proper noun (as “White” is a racial category). Avoid “Caucasian.”

**White privilege**

Term coined by activist Peggy McIntosh to describe advantages that are conferred to **White** people in many Western societies. These are advantages and experiences the majority of **White** people are unaware of, but **people of color** do not typically enjoy. Examples



of White privilege include: not being spoken to aggressively by law enforcement, not being followed around a store by a clerk, being considered the “beauty standard,” or not getting typecast into roles based on racial tropes and stereotypes.

**whitelist**

See **blacklist**.

**women of color**

Collective term for **women** from non-**White** racial groups. See **people of color**.

**WOC or WoC**

Acronym for **women of color**. Write out for first mention.



# GENDER

Some people find the gender they are assigned at birth seems right for them and some people do not. In either case, gender plays a central role in to how a person presents themselves to the world, and ties in how they should be addressed.

General guidelines to remember when writing about gender:

- Ultimately, being a man, a woman, nonbinary, or genderfluid is a question of self-identification and presentation. The same holds true of all aspects of gender.
- Ask for information, instead of assuming (name, pronouns, gender if relevant). And actually use this information.
- Don't misgender or deadname people.
- Don't romanticise being transgender or nonbinary.

— Ellen Dash

## **agender**

Someone who does not identify as having a **gender**. This does not imply they are **aromantic** or **asexual**.

## **biological reductionism**

Biological reductionism is used to argue for **gender essentialism**, or that some characteristics are inherently feminine or masculine. You can spot a biologically reductionist argument when you hear phrases like “**Men** are naturally sexually promiscuous,” “Boys will be boys,” or “**Women** just don't advocate for themselves.” Sociologists draw a line between gender roles and biological sex. Biological reductionism also uses pseudo science to support the belief that **gender** is a binary and that people's actions, opinions, and preferences are dictated by their biological sex.

### **cisgender or cis**

A cisgender person has an identity that matches the **gender** they were assigned at **birth**. Use instead of “**normal**.”

### **deadname**

A person’s old name. Don’t refer to people by it unless they explicitly tell you to and, even then, only do it in the contexts they say to. This term can also be used as a verb, meaning the act of referring to someone by their deadname.

### **gender**

Often inaccurately said to be “the state of being a **man** or a **woman**”, gender is more accurately a description of how someone relates to the **gender binary**.

### **gender binary**

The extremely simplistic approach to understanding **gender** that assumes everyone is either a **man** or a **woman**. In reality, gender is a lot more complicated than this. See also **genderqueer**, **nonbinary**, and **agender**.

### **gender expression**

How a person communicates their **gender** using appearance and behavior. There are many degrees and grades of gender expression. Gender expression (clothes, haircut, external signals) is not the same as **gender identity**. A trans woman (**gender identity**) can choose to dress in a butch (gender expression) style with ties and vests.

### **gender identity**

Gender identity is a person’s internal sense of their **gender**. For **cisgender** people, their **gender** identity aligns with the **gender** they were assigned at **birth**. Avoid assuming a person’s gender identity based on the way they appear. A trans woman (gender identity) can choose to dress in a butch (**gender expression**) style with ties and vests.

Use care to avoid othering someone by using gender in reference to a **cis** person’s **gender**, while using gender identity in reference to a **transgender**, **genderqueer**, or **nonbinary** person’s **gender**. Not only are the two terms not parallel, misusing these terms can imply that a **cisgender** person doesn’t have a gender identity.

### **gender neutral forms of address**

Instead of phrases like “you guys” or “men,” use something like the plural “you,” “y’all,” “you lot,” “folks,” etc. (Unless you’re literally referring to a group of guys.)

Some more examples:

Use: people, humanity

Not: mankind

Use: work force, employees

Not: manpower

Use: to staff, to run, to operate

Not: to man

### **gendered violence**

Gendered violence happens because the target belongs to a perceived **gender**. For example, **street harassment** is almost always directed at **women**. That is a form of gendered violence. Female circumcision is also a form of gendered violence. Gendered violence directed toward people identified as **men** is often enacted to make someone conform to **toxic masculinity**.

### **genderqueer**

A person who does not identify with a single place in the **gender binary** and instead places themselves somewhere on a gender spectrum. Alternately, someone whose **gender expression** is intentionally ambiguous or mixed.

Usage: Jamie identifies as genderqueer and uses **they**/them **pronouns**.

### **journey**

**Transition** is often costly and dangerous — don’t fluff it up by romanticising it. If you consider using the word “journey” to refer to someone’s **transition**, you should probably seriously re-think what you’re saying.

### **male and female connectors**

The use of the terms “male” and “female” when referring to connectors of various sorts is based on the idea that “male” implies having a penis and “female” implies having a vagina, which is false (even among **cisgender** individuals). There are other terms for

these types of connectors, and these other terms are often already preferred in many settings, e.g., a plug goes into a socket (also referred to as a receptacle, jack, or port).

### **man**

A person who identifies as a man. Traits or characteristics traditionally associated with men are often considered masculine. Possessing a **Y chromosome** or a penis does not automatically mean that a person identifies as a man. A person who is assigned “male” at **birth** does not automatically identify as a man.

### **misandry**

Literally, misandry means hatred or contempt towards **men**. However, the word is frequently used to describe an individual’s legitimate distrust and fear of **men** due to their positions of power and opportunities to oppress others (often by **men** experiencing **toxic masculinity**).

### **misogynoir**

Hatred, contempt, or prejudice towards **Black women**, specifically in ways where **race** and **gender** both play roles. Moya Bailey created the term to address misogyny directed at **Black women** in American culture.

### **misogyny**

Hatred, contempt, or prejudice towards **women** is known as misogyny.

### **neopronouns**

There are newer sets of personal **pronouns** (e.g., ze/zir/zirs/zirself or xey/xem/xyr/xemself), called neopronouns. If you don’t know how a particular set of neopronouns work, you can ask the person using them to explain them to you, or look them up on <http://pronoun.is>.

### **nonbinary, nb, or enby**

As a noun, a **gender** outside of the **gender binary**. As an adjective, the state of a person’s **gender** being outside of the **gender binary**.

### **preferred pronouns**

This term implies a **transgender**, **non-binary**, or gender-nonconforming person’s **pronouns** are somehow less legitimate, as though they are a mere preference, not definitive. Simply use the word **pronouns** instead.

## **pronouns**

The set of pronouns to use when referring to someone, e.g., **they**/them, she/her, he/him.

You should ask someone what pronouns to use for them if you're going to communicate regularly, and especially if you're going to write about them. If you're in a situation where you can't ask (e.g., for an obituary), and you don't know for sure what pronouns you should use for them, **they**/them is always a safe bet.

When someone says something along the lines of "my pronoun is ...," you should use those pronouns when referring to them.

## **TERF**

This abbreviation stands for "**Transgender** Exclusionary Radical **Feminist**." They're a kind of "**feminist**" that is actively hostile towards **transgender** people. They often intentionally spread misinformation to encourage fear and hatred of **transgender** people.

## **they (singular)**

Some people want to be referred to using singular they (that is, they/them/their/themself instead of he/him/his/himself or she/her/her/herself). Singular "they" is valid as a **pronoun**. Asserting otherwise just makes you a jerk. Don't be a jerk.

## **toxic masculinity**

Toxic masculinity is a belief system that positions **men** as attacked by **feminism**, **women**, or political correctness. This adversarial relationship expresses itself in **misogyny** and aggressive enforcement of "masculine" behavior on other **men** and boys. Such behaviour can include violence, sexual aggression, and minimization of emotional health. Frequently, it is associated with phrases such as "real men," "red pill," and "alpha male."

## **transgender or trans**

The state of a person's **gender** not matching their biological sex assigned at **birth**.

## **transmisogyny**

Hatred, contempt, or prejudice towards **transgender women**.

## **transsexual**

Related, but not equivalent to **transgender**. Generally, you should use “**transgender**” instead, unless the person being discussed specifically asks you to use the word “transsexual.”

## **transition**

The process of a **transgender** person adjusting their life to live in ways that they feel align with their actual **gender** (as opposed to the one assigned at birth). As a verb, the act of undergoing this process.

## **TWEF**

Stands for **Transgender Women** Exclusionary **Feminist**. Like a **TERF**, but they specifically target **transgender women**.

## **two spirit**

The term “two spirit” is an umbrella term used by some **Native Americans** to describe specific people within their communities who take on spiritual roles associated with third and fourth **genders**. Gender roles associated with third and fourth genders vary between tribes, as can the role of two-spirit people. These roles do not directly map to **LGBTQIA** identities and “two spirit” should not be used to describe a person who is not a member of a **Native American** tribe. While “two spirit” has been generally received as a useful pan-tribal term, use tribal-specific terms whenever possible. Never refer to a person as “two spirit” who does not identify as such.

## **woman**

A person who identifies as a woman. Traits or characteristics traditionally associated with women are often considered feminine. Possessing two **X chromosomes** or a vagina does not automatically mean that a person identifies as a woman. A person who is assigned “female” at **birth** does not automatically identify as a woman.



# SEXUALITY

Sexuality, our relationship with our own minds and bodies, and the bodies and minds of others, is both deeply personal and sometimes deeply political. No one can tell who you are attracted to just by looking at you, but we've created a number of cultural constructs that make us believe we can understand sexuality from the outside.

As a responsible writer, your first priority should be to make sure that you are identifying someone the way they want to be identified. These self-identifications are often very political, so you should do your best to use the exact words your subject used. It's not a neutral choice to switch dyke and lesbian — the words mean different things within the community.

There is no single LGBTQIA community, and no one person you can go to to ask what queer people think about an issue. Instead, there are many overlapping and intertwining communities of identity and practice. If you can learn to distinguish between free, libre, and open software communities, you can do the same for communities of sexual identity.

Any time sexuality comes up in your writing, there should be an affirmative reason you're including it. It needs to relate to your topic, not just be a lazy descriptor. Descriptions of sexuality tend to marginalize anyone who the reader doesn't see as “normal,” which frequently means White, male, straight, or cisgender. If sexuality is relevant to what you are writing about, be careful to think about how you are portraying it: there is a world of difference between “drunk girl felt up in Vegas” and “security professional assaulted while at a company outing.” They could be describing the same event, but the way you write about it will influence perception.

The reason I agreed to edit this section is that it's important for me to give people a view into how complicated and amazingly rich sexuality can be, and to remind us all that sex and sexuality are a part of the human condition. Responsible communicators will let people name and identify themselves, and be aware of how power and politics can affect our discussion of sexuality.

— Heidi Waterhouse

### **abstinence**

Abstinence is choosing not to engage in an activity. This term is commonly used for both sexual activity and the consumption of alcohol. For example, sexual abstinence is choosing not to engage in **sexual activity**.

### **adult film actor**

An adult film actor is a person who has chosen to be filmed in adult-rated films or **pornography**. People filmed in sexual situations that they do not expect to be shared are not actors, but rather private people.

### **age of consent**

The age of consent is the age at which a person is legally allowed to engage in **sexual activity**. An adult having a sexual relationship with someone under the age of consent is statutory rape. Never imply that a child was “lucky” to have sex with an adult or “seduced” the adult. The age of consent may vary according to the age of the other party or the **marriage** status. For instance, in some U.S. states, a person can get married at 16 and legally have sex with their spouse, even if the state’s age of consent is 18.

### **aggressor**

An aggressor is a person who initiates a negative interaction. This term can be used where calling someone a **harasser** or **rapist** presents a legal issue.

### **aromantic**

Someone who experiences little or no romantic attraction. This does not imply them being **agender** or **asexual**.

### **asexuality**

An asexual person identifies themselves as uninterested in **sexual activity**. Asexual people may still form romantic relationships and even be married. Treat asexuality as an **orientation**, the same way you would if someone was **lesbian** or **bisexual**. “Ace” may be used in informal situations. A person may be asexual without being **agender** or **aromantic**.

### **authority figure**

A person with more power or perceived power than others is an authority figure. For example, coaches, pastors, investors, managers, and teachers all have a power relationship with the people they work with, and therefore it is difficult for them to

ethically have a **sexual or romantic relationship**, since it is hard to give full **consent** with a power imbalance.

### **bisexual**

A bisexual person is attracted to their own or other **genders**.

### **bystander**

A bystander is a person not directly involved in an incident. Bystanders may be witnesses or they may remain uninvolved.

### **catcall**

See **street harassment**.

### **chastity**

Chastity is the choice to **abstain** from sexual contact. Historically, chastity has been a virtue or requirement associated only with **women**. Do not use unless your subject identifies as part of a chastity-oriented group.

### **chattel**

Chattel is an historic word for a possession. **Women** used to be considered a possession of their fathers or **husbands**.

### **cheating**

See **infidelity**.

### **childfree**

Childfree people have decided not to have children. Use instead of **childless**.

### **consent**

An ongoing and affirmative agreement to engage in an activity. Consent can be compromised by mental alteration or inability, power imbalances, or coercion, as well as other factors.

### **cunnilingus**

Cunnilingus is oral sex performed on a **woman**.

### **date rape**

**Rape** by a known person, especially in the context of a date or **relationship**, is sometimes called date rape. Do not use, as it diminishes the fact that it is **rape**.

### **demisexual**

A demisexual person is only **sexually attracted** to people that they have a **romantic relationship** with.

### **divorce**

Divorce is the legal dissolution of a **marriage**. If the marriage is not **heterosexual**, just use divorce without modifiers like “gay divorce.”

### **dub-con**

Dubious consent or dub-con is an identifier mostly used in fiction or fan fiction to describe a circumstance where someone could not appropriately consent. In real life, dub-con is also known as **non-consensual**.

### **dyke**

Dyke is a slang term for **lesbian**. This is a term of self-identification. Some people embrace it and some find it insulting. Do not use this term unless someone self-identifies it.

### **enthusiastic consent**

Enthusiastic **consent** is clear, ongoing, and not coerced.

### **evolutionary psychology**

Evolutionary psychology is an attempt to retrofit societal beliefs onto what we know of very early humanity. It is scientifically dubious, at best. For example, arguing that makeup is intended to make **women** look younger and more fertile assumes that things modern humans find attractive are the same as they were long enough ago to exert evolutionary pressures.

### **fag**

Fag is another term for **gay man**. This is a term of **self-identification**. Some people embrace it and some find it insulting. Do not use this term unless someone **self-identifies**.

### **fellatio**

Oral sex performed on a **man** is called fellatio.

### **flagging**

Flagging is the act of identifying oneself as a member of a community. This is frequently is not intended for use by people outside the community.

## **gay**

A gay **man** is **sexually** and **romantically** attracted to men. It's also used as an umbrella term for many non-**heterosexual** people who are **romantically** and / or **sexually** attracted to the same **gender**. Sometimes used as an insult: "That's so gay" is common, but offensive. Do not use **homo** or **fag**.

## **head of household or head of family**

The person who sets the rules and expectations for a family is sometimes known as the head of household. Traditionally, this was always the adult **man**. Now that relationships can be more egalitarian, this term has fallen out of favor, but is still around in government forms and other places.

## **heterosexual**

A heterosexual person is attracted to people of other **genders** but not their own.

## **homo**

See **gay**.

## **homosexual**

A homosexual person is attracted to people of the same **gender** but not other **genders**.

## **husband**

A married **man**. When writing about someone's **spouse**, be sure that you don't assume their **gender**. If a man says he is raising kids with his **partner**, don't assume his partner is a **woman** or "a mom."

## **impaired consent**

Impaired consent is obtained under questionable circumstances. If someone is chemically altered, drunk, or in a place where saying no does not seem safe, they may say yes to **sexual activity** that they would not agree to ordinarily. It is the responsibility of all people engaging in **sexual activity** to be sure that **consent** can be given or withdrawn based on clear thinking.

## **infidelity**

Infidelity is violating the rules of a relationship as agreed on by the participants and may also be referred to as **adultery** or **cheating**. Infidelity is the preferred term. Frequently these terms are used to refer to sexual infidelity, but adultery also applies to emotional infidelity. A relationship does not need to be **monogamous** for

someone to violate the rules of the relationship. Most Americans assume that the rules of **marriage** are **monogamous**, but haven't discussed expectations of fidelity explicitly with their **partners**.

### **intercourse**

Intercourse is a **sexual activity** usually understood to be penis-in-vagina. Some groups of people define this act in various ways, so don't assume that intercourse means the same thing to everyone.

### **john**

A john is a person, usually a **man**, who hires **prostitutes**. Generally, avoid this term.

### **lesbian**

A lesbian is a **woman sexually** and **romantically** attracted to women.

### **LGBTQ**

See **LGBTQIA**.

### **LGBTQIA**

This acronym is used to identify communities of people who do not identify as **heterosexual**, where letters stand for communities, including **Lesbian**, **Gay**, **Queer** (or Questioning), **Intersex**, **Lesbian**, **Trans**, **Bisexual**, **Asexual**, or **Gay**. See also **QUILT BAG**.

### **Lolita**

Lolita is a reference to a novel of that name by Vladimir Nabokov. The book chronicles the **sexual** relationship of a much older man and a young teen girl. When used in reference to a young woman, it implies that she has a seductive sexuality. Do not describe a **woman** or girl's **sexuality** as Lolita-like. Confusingly, there is also a Japanese subculture that identifies as "lolita" or "lolly." Young women or girls costume themselves in elaborate lace and frills. If someone self-identifies as a member of this culture, usage may be acceptable.

### **LUG**

An abbreviation for "**lesbian** until graduation." It is a derogatory way to refer to **women** who had same-sex relationships early in their life. The term should be avoided.

### **madonna / whore**

Madonna / whore is a shorthand for the way that **women** are

commonly treated as **sexually pure** (and therefore valuable), or **sexually active** (and therefore degraded). This limited presentation of **women's** roles is harmful in both directions.

### **marital rape**

**Rape** that occurs within the context of a **marriage** is called marital rape. Historically, **marriage** was considered “blanket consent” and a person could not withhold **consent** from their spouse. This is no longer true under U.S. law, though laws vary from country to country. Lack of **consent** for a **sexual activity** is **rape**.

### **marriage**

A legal and sometimes religious contract that unifies two people into a single contractual unit.

### **masturbation**

Masturbation is the act of sexually pleasuring oneself.

### **monogamy**

Monogamy is a **relationship** structure that allows sexual and emotional relationships with only one other person. Most of American culture assumes that relationships are monogamous even in childhood.

### **MSM**

An abbreviation of “**men seeking men.**” Some **men** who prefer **men sexually** do not identify as **gay** or **homosexual**.

### **neutral identifier**

A neutral identifier is used in a story to avoid using someone’s name or influencing a criminal case or disciplinary effects. For example, use “the student” in identifying a person on campus who accuses someone else of sexual assault. If the assault has not been proven yet, “**victim**” and “alleged victim” are inappropriate.

### **non-monogamy**

Non-monogamous relationships are negotiated to include the possibility or reality of more than one sexual or romantic **partner**. There are many flavors of non-monogamy, including **polyamory** and swinging. Unless someone has identified themselves, use non-monogamous.

## **out**

An out person is open about their **sexuality** or **relationship** structure, especially if it is not **heterosexual** or **monogamous**. “Outing” is also a verb, which means to reveal someone’s **sexuality** without their **consent**.

## **pansexual**

Pansexual people are **romantically** and **sexually** attracted to people of many **genders**.

## **partner**

A person with an acknowledged **relationship** that may not be **marriage**. Especially in countries where **marriage** is less culturally important, “partner” takes the place of “**spouse**” and is frequently modified by the duration, such as “Ms. Amelia Buckthorpe, his partner of 18 years, said that James had likely gone for a midnight swim as was his custom.”

## **persuasion**

Persuasion, in a sexual context, is talking someone into something they originally said no to. Avoid using the term persuasion, because it can be a form of coercion.

## **polyamorous**

See **non-monogamous**.

## **pornography**

A visual or textual representation intended to provoke sexual interest. The abbreviation “porn” can be used derogatorily to imply something is only interesting because it appeals to sexuality, so use the full term only. Especially avoid using “porn” or other sexually charged terms as a descriptor of technical attractiveness, such as “video monitor porn” or “orgasmically fast internet speeds.”

## **power imbalance**

A power imbalance occurs when people in a **relationship** have unequal standing in the world that may impair the ability to give free **consent**. For example, a manager cannot have an equitable relationship with their direct report because they have a great deal more power. A professor has power over a student. Many professionals are forbidden by their ethical agreements to have relationships with their clients because of the power imbalance.



### **pre-marital sex**

Pre-marital sex is engaging in **sexual activity**, especially **intercourse**, before **marriage**. Some cultures believe that **sex** is only appropriate in the context of **marriage** and that **sex** before that is **sinful** or forbidden.

### **prison rape**

Prison rape is **rape** in the context of incarceration. Although this is sometimes treated as a joke, **rape** is not a good subject for humor.

### **promise rings**

Promise rings are used mainly in **chastity**-focused subcultures as a commitment to **abstain** from **sex**.

### **prostitute**

A prostitute is a person who practices **sex work**, especially **intercourse**. See **sex worker**.

### **purity**

Purity is a social construct that values sexual **abstinence** in unmarried people. Purity cultures and cultures where there is a value placed on **virginity** often overlap.

### **queer**

Queer was once a slur, but is now frequently used as an umbrella term for **LGBTQIA** people. Ask people for their preferences around this term.

### **questionable consent**

See **dub-con**.

### **QUILTBAG**

This acronym is used to identify communities of people who do not identify as **heterosexual**, where the letters stand for communities, including **Queer** (or Questioning), Unidentified, **Intersex**, **Lesbian**, **Trans**, **Bisexual**, **Asexual**, or **Gay**. See also **LGBTQIA**.

### **rainbow**

A flag with (usually) six stripes in the colors of the rainbow. This is the most common symbolism used to identify **LGBTQIA**-friendly places, organizations, or people.

## **rape**

**Sexual activity** or assault without **consent** or with coerced or dubious consent is rape. Rape can happen to anyone and be committed by anyone. The term “rape culture” describes the implicit and explicit social cues that minimizes the impact of rape, creating a cultural incubator for gender and sexual violence.

## **rapist**

A person who commits **rape** is a rapist. Rapists can be any **gender**, age, or social status. When describing a convicted rapist in the context of the **rape**, do not refer to them as athletes, students, pastors, or whatever their other identifier may be. Doing so minimizes the reason they are newsworthy. See also **aggressor**.

## **regrets**

Regrets are often mentioned as a possible reason for someone to report a **rape** when the **sex** was actually **consensual**. Because of the difficulty and trauma of reporting a **rape**, almost no one does it trivially or if they were **consenting** at the time. Do not mention that a **rape victim** “regretted” having **sex** with a **rapist** and avoid using the word in general.

## **relationship**

A relationship is the set of interactions and expectations two or more people have with each other. Relationships can be explicit, such as **marriage** or formal mentorship, or implicit, such as a friendship. Most people define relationships as enduring across multiple interactions, not just a single point.

## **revenge porn**

Revenge porn is intimate or **pornographic** images shared in the context of a **relationship** that are then made public after a relationship ends. While this private information may have been created or shared consensually, revenge porn is shared publicly without **consent**. In many cases, **consent** to the existence of these image may no longer exist, having been implicitly or explicitly removed.

## **-romantic**

A suffix that describes the **gender** of your preferred **romantic partners**, the same way -sexual describes the **gender** of your preferred **sexual partners**. A person can have different **romantic** and **sexual orientations**. For example, a person might be bi-romantic and enjoy **relationships** with more than one **gender**,

but only be sexually attracted to one **gender**. **Asexual** people may identify themselves as **romantically oriented**.

### **romantic orientation**

Romantic orientation is the type of person someone falls in love with. Romantic orientation could encompass **gender identity**, **gender expression**, or any number of other aspects of a person. Romantic orientation is usually, but not always, the same as **sexual orientation**.

### **romantic partners**

Romantic partners agree that they are in a romantic **relationship**. This may include **marriage** or other long-term commitments, but not always. When you are trying to describe an adult's date to the company party, it may be more neutral and appropriate to refer to them as a romantic partner than a boyfriend or girlfriend.

### **safer sex**

Safer sex is a set of practices that makes the transmission of **sexually transmitted infections** or **pregnancy** less likely. No **sex** is perfectly safe, but these are best practices.

### **sex**

Sex is a physical or mental activity that is erotic. Frequently sex is assumed to take place with another person, but another person is not necessary. Also known as **sexual activity**. See also **biological sex**.

### **sex sells**

"Sex sells" is an old argument that people, especially **men**, are enticed into buying goods if they feel that it will get them more access to sexual labor. For example, a model in a bikini holding a beer is supposed to make the **heterosexual** male buyer feel that he would be more attractive if he bought that brand of beer. This idea is still commonly used in advertising and also at trade shows (where "booth babes" serve as a way to make vendor booths more attractive to **heterosexual** men).

### **sex worker**

A sex worker is a person who **consensually** exchanges their sexual labor for money. Sex workers may engage in **prostitution**, **pornography**, phone sex, or other activities that may or may not involve touch. Assume adult sex workers have autonomy. Do not

insult or degrade them or their work. Do not use terms like whore, hooker, streetwalker, or other terms that have heavy cultural connotations of disgust or disdain.

### **sexual activity**

See **sex**.

### **sexual attraction**

Sexual attraction is sometimes called sexual desire. It is who someone is physically attracted to. Sexual attraction is common to all sorts of people, including those who have committed to avoid **sexual activity** with others. People can be sexually attracted to someone without revealing or disclosing their attraction, especially in times or places it's inappropriate.

### **sexual orientation**

Sexual orientation identifies the **gender** of someone's preferred **sexual** and **romantic partner**. There are many sexual orientations, including, but not limited to: **heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, gay, queer, WSW, MSM, and asexual**.

### **sexual partner**

A sexual partner is someone a person is having **sex** with. They may be a one-time partner or a long-term life partner. Sexual partners are usually only identified voluntarily or because of a public health need. For example, a doctor may ask a married person if they have any other sexual partners.

### **single parent**

Don't use "unwed mother" to talk about someone who decides to have a child. That implies that people should be **married** before engaging in **sex** or having babies. Instead, use "single parent."

### **slut / stud**

Slut and stud are a heteronormative dichotomy centered around sexual experience or promiscuity. A **man** who has many **partners** or has **sex** frequently might be seen as admirable, a stud. A woman who engaged in the same activity would be identified as a slut, which has strong negative associations. Avoid referring to anyone by these terms and take care that you are not praising someone for something you would condemn in a person of another **gender**.

### **societal perception**

Societal perception is a summary of how a person is seen and treated by the culture and social circles they are in. This is a combination of established beliefs about **gender**, **sexual orientation**, **race**, and other factors, and the way a person chooses to present themselves. For example, the societal perception of an unknown **Latino man** might expect **heterosexuality**, but people who knew an individual in that category might know him as a **queer** person.

### **spouse**

A married person of unspecified **gender**. People frequently refer to their “spouse” if their **marriage partner** is non-traditional in some way.

### **stalking**

Stalking is the act of pursuing someone after they have said “no” to or left a **relationship**, or otherwise declined to be involved. Stalking is a persistent violation of boundaries including physical proximity, online security, or personal safety. Stalking can sometimes escalate into violence and is therefore frequently used as grounds for a restraining order. Avoid minimizing the serious nature of stalking.

### **straight**

Straight is another word for **heterosexual**. Attracted to the “opposite” **gender**, going by the typical **gender binary**. It is the identifier most commonly used to contrast with **gay** or **queer**. For example, a school might have a Gay-Straight Alliance.

### **street harassment**

Catcalling is a form of public harassment that is heavily **gendered**. It is almost always **women** or girls targeted by **men**. Also called “Eve Teasing.” Be clear that this is an unsolicited and frequently frightening interaction. Even if the content is “complimentary,” unsolicited compliments from strangers are frightening and discourage being in public.

### **statutory rape**

See **age of consent**.

### **survivor**

A sexual assault survivor is someone who wants to talk about their assault without classifying themselves as a **victim** or powerless. Check with the person if you can to see how they want to be identified. See also **victim**.

### **triangle**

A triangle (usually equilateral) or pink triangle is a visual symbol for **homosexuality**. Originally used in Nazi Germany to identify **homosexual men**, it has been repurposed as a positive group identifier.

### **unprotected sex**

Unprotected sex is **sexual activity** between two or more people that does not include precautions against **STIs** or **pregnancy**. Also known as unsafe sex.

### **unwed mother**

See **single parent**.

### **verbal consent**

Verbal consent is agreeing to something explicitly. “Yes, I want that” is an example of verbal consent. Nodding, or not saying anything, is not verbal consent, and may not be **consent** at all.

### **victim**

A victim is someone who has experienced a negative or traumatic interaction. In some circumstances, sexual assault victims prefer to be identified as **survivors**, which is much more empowering than the passive cast that “victim” has. If possible, determine how someone wants to be identified.

### **virgin**

Virginity is a societal concept that places a certain value on a person who has not had **intercourse** or **sex**. Related concepts include lost virginity and virginity as a gift. For women from **chastity**-oriented cultures or subcultures, virginity is an important personal attribute and “losing” virginity is considered embarrassing or disgraceful. Since virginity is not a physical condition, it is impossible to make a factual comment about it. Avoid in your writing.

### **whore**

Whore is a derogatory term for a **sex worker** and should not be used. It is especially used for **women**, whether or not they are actually **sex workers**, to indicate sexual promiscuity.

### **wife**

A **married woman**. When writing about someone’s **spouse**, be sure that you don’t assume their **gender**. For example, a **woman** might

say that her **spouse** was hospitalized, and be talking about her wife. Avoid using any construction where the role of **spouse** replaces a person's name, such as "I have to check with the wife." Especially in articles about **women**, don't use who she is married to as a primary identifier. Avoid constructions like: "Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, wife of famous poet Percy Bysshe Shelley ..."

### **withdrawn consent**

Withdrawn consent is the act of saying "no" to an activity after saying "yes." For example, a person may be enjoying kissing and then decide they want to be done and say so. That is withdrawing **consent** to be kissed.

### **women-loving**

Woman-loving is a person who is attracted to other **women**. This usage is especially common in **African American** communities, where **lesbian** is a less accepted term.

### **WSW**

An abbreviation for "**Women** who have **Sex** with **Women**." WSW is a term used by medical professionals to describe **women** who have **sex** with **women** but may not identify themselves as **lesbians**.





# WELL-BEING

This section refers to the health and well-being of the body, both physically and mentally. Many terms are medical — or adopted language by those affected by a condition — and put in context common phrases, explaining why they might be problematic or insulting to someone with a related condition.

Before you start describing a subject or source in terms of their health, consider these questions:

- Is an individual's health relevant to your project in any way? If, for instance, you're writing a profile about a person's technical proficiency, their health probably isn't relevant. If it isn't relevant, don't write about it.
- Are you sharing information that you have permission to share publicly? Without explicit permission, you may be violating someone's personal privacy. You may also be limiting their opportunities in the future.
- Does the person in question have a diagnosis from an accredited medical professional? If not, don't assign a diagnosis (even if it's a self-diagnosis).

When discussing a person's health, especially in terms of limitations, focus on the specific illness or disability they experience. Be specific and use correct medical terminology. Understand the context of these conditions: Even in a perfect world of easy and inexpensive access to modern medical care (ha!), most of the diagnoses in this section are difficult to manage.

We're not trying to be the next WebMD. But we do want to address some common physical and mental issues people experience and how colloquialisms and certain common phrases of speech and behaviors are actually hurtful, dismissive, and harmful to others.

— *Melissa Chavez*

### **ableism or ableist**

Ableism knowingly or unknowingly puts able-bodied and able-minded people first without thought to those who are not.

### **abnormal**

See **normal**.

### **abortion**

Abortion is the act of ending a **pregnancy**. It is also known as pregnancy termination. Do not use abortion to refer to non-pregnancy related events. Abortion techniques are also used for other gynecological health needs. See also **anti-abortion** and **pro-abortion rights**.

### **accessibility**

Whether a product, application, location, or piece of media is accessible depends on its difficulty of usability by a person with one or more **disabilities**.

### **accommodation**

An accommodation is an adaptation that is part of learning. Accommodation changes existing ideas about how something is done to increase information intake and understanding. It's a refinement process in how one gathers and processes information as they learn new facts and have new experiences.

### **adjustment**

An adjustment is an adaptation that is part of the physical way in which one navigates the world. It applies to fulfilling needs in order to relieve negative stimuli or stressors and balancing those needs with environmental factors. Example: Someone requires nourishment, but they must determine where and how to get food while minimizing factors like distance and transit **accessibility**.

### **addiction**

A neurobiological **disease**, addiction's key symptom is impaired control (over the use of a substance or the performance of an act). Do not **out** someone as an addict unless they have given permission to do so. Avoid jokes or flippant references to this.

### **ageism**

The term "ageism" describes stereotyping or prejudice a person may experience due to their current age or as a part of the aging process. An example to avoid: Saying something is "so easy, even

your mom (or grandparent) could do it.” This implies ageism and other negative stereotypes.

### **alcoholism**

See **addiction**.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became federal law in the U.S., in order to address discrimination on the basis of **disability**. The acronym for the legislation’s name, ADA, has become shorthand for facilities that comply with the standards set forth in the law.

### **American Sign Language**

In North America, many people who are **deaf** or hard of hearing use American Sign Language (ASL) as a primary or secondary means of communication. The language uses hand positions and motions as well as facial expression and body posture. It is a complete language. It is not a universal language recognized worldwide, and other countries and regions have their own sign languages.

### **amputation**

During an amputation, a body extremity (limb or appendage) is removed to stop blood loss, or prevent infection or **disease** from spreading, or for other reasons. Do not compare leaving your phone at home to losing a limb.

### **anti-abortion rights**

A person who is anti-abortion supports limiting or removing all access to **abortion**. Avoid using the term “pro-life” because there are medical situations in which an **abortion** is a necessary life-saving measure. The discussion of abortion rights does not fall along a binary: a person can be **pro-abortion rights** while advocating on certain limitations on **abortion**. See also **pro-abortion rights**.

### **anxiety**

While anxiety — an emotion typically characterized by temporary worrying or stress responses — may be common, some people also experience anxiety disorders. Anxiety **disorders** manifest for long stretches of time and affect one’s ability to do day-to-day activities.

### **assistive device**

Assistive devices maintain or improve a person’s ability to interact and participate in an activity.

## **Attention Deficit Disorder / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**

Abbreviated ADD and ADHD, these **disorders** are common mental disorders that share symptoms of restlessness, difficulty with organization, and impulsivity. Do not flippantly use to describe someone unless they have been **diagnosed**.

### **attitude**

If wanting to make a reference to someone's attitude, make sure you are not reducing their passion (or lack thereof) of a subject down to pure emotion. There is a reason why someone may be afraid, angry, standoffish, etc., and it is not just that they have a "bad" attitude. Be detailed about **well-being** or don't include it at all.

### **autism**

Autism is one of five types of spectrum **disorders** that affects development. There is a wide variety in how someone can be affected, including difficulty interacting socially, difficulty interpreting differences between verbal and nonverbal communication, and displaying repetitive behaviors or obsessive interests. Autism communities often use **identity-first language**. Asperger's syndrome is no longer used by the American Psychiatric Association as a diagnosis, but some people with autism spectrum disorders prefer that term.

### **autoimmune**

A type of **disease** where your body's immune system attacks its own healthy cells, causing infection or other types of **disease** such as **diabetes**, Celiac, **multiple sclerosis**, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, and others.

### **barren**

An archaic and insulting term referring to someone's lack of fertility, inability to become **pregnant**, or successfully carry a child to term.

### **benign**

Something that is relatively harmless may be referred to as benign. In medical terms, this means a condition is less imminently dangerous, as it is less likely to do as much harm if it grows.

**biological sex**

Refers to how many **X** and **Y chromosomes** are contained in one's DNA. Biological sex is distinct from **gender** and **sexuality**.

**bipolar disorder**

This **mental illness** causes drastic changes in mood, behavior, energy levels, and more. Use the term “bipolar disorder” and avoid older terms, like manic depression. If a person self-identifies using an older term, you may use it, but consider adding additional context to connect that term to modern terminology.

**birth**

The **delivery** of a child that concludes a **pregnancy**.

**birth control**

Birth control is any method someone uses to avoid **pregnancy**. Birth control is also a blanket term used to refer to **hormonal medications** some people use to mitigate other health conditions whether or not they intend to prevent **pregnancy**.

**blind**

The term “blind” only refers to those with complete loss of sight. A person may have low vision, limited vision, or be partially sighted if they experience partial vision loss. Avoid terms like “turn a blind eye.”

**cancer**

A **medical diagnosis** with a wide variety of **treatments** that can affect numerous parts of the body. Do not use this term to describe a person or movement. For example, avoid: “That person is a cancer to America who should be cut out ...”

**caregiver**

A caregiver assists another person (who may or may not have a **disability, illness, or injury**). Avoid using “caretaker” in place of “caregiver.”

**childbirth**

See **delivery**.

**chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy (without a modifier) typically refers to drug therapies used in cancer **treatment**, which aim toward curative

results, prolonging life, or reducing symptoms. Other types of chemotherapy exist, such as antimicrobial chemotherapy, which treats infectious diseases.

### **chromosome**

A DNA molecule containing part or all of the genetic material of an organism. In humans, each cell normally contains 23 chromosomes.

### **chronic**

Often used to describe **illnesses**, pain, or numbness, “chronic” describes a condition that persists for a long period of time or recurs constantly.

### **clean or dirty**

Avoid the terms “clean” and “dirty” when describing individuals, behaviors, or test results — both for substances and illnesses. For test results, “**normal**” and “**abnormal**” may be used.

### **color blind**

Color blindness is a **genetic disorder** that mostly affects the **Y chromosome**. See also **colorblind**.

### **conception dates**

Conception date is the day used to calculate fetal age. It is not actually the date of conception. **Pregnancy** is calculated from the first day of the last **menstrual** period (LMP), so a pregnant person is technically pregnant for about two weeks before an egg is fertilized. This LMP is used for fetal age for the entirety of a **pregnancy** and especially when discussing **abortion** timing.

### **congenital disability**

A person with a congenital disability has had that **disability** since birth. Avoid terms that imply deficiency or inferiority, such as “birth defect.”

### **crazy**

Avoid. See **mental illness**.

### **deaf**

The term “deaf” only refers to those with complete loss of hearing. Otherwise, refer to as hard of hearing. Do not use “deaf-mute” or “deaf and dumb” under any circumstances. When referring to Deaf culture and community, capitalize.

### **delivery**

Delivery is giving **birth** to a child. Remember that people of any **gender** can and do give birth. This can also be used if the **pregnancy** is not ending in a live **birth**, such as in the case of a stillbirth.

### **dementia**

Used as a general term for a range of symptoms across multiple **diseases**, “dementia” is a noticeable decline in mental ability that interferes with daily life. Symptoms may include memory loss, personality changes, and communication difficulties. Whenever possible, reference a specific **disease**. Avoid terms like “demented” or “senile.”

### **depression**

Known in full as “major depressive disorder” someone experiencing depression may lose interest in activities, feel empty or hopeless, experience persistent fatigue, or a variety of other symptoms.

### **developmental disability**

Used as an umbrella term, a “developmental disability” impairs learning, language, behaviour, and physical development.

### **diabetes**

A **disorder** that negatively affects the body’s ability to produce or process the **hormone** insulin.

### **diagnosis**

Used for treatment, study, and categorization, a “diagnosis” is an identification made of an **illness**, **injury**, or other problem through an examination of a person’s symptoms.

### **disability**

A physical or mental limitation on a person’s ability to perform major life activities is a disability. Do not describe someone as disabled unless it is obvious that distinction must be made to progress the story, article, or post. If it needs clarification, give detail about the type of disability and how a person might be limited in activities as a result. See also **identity-first language** and **person-first language**. Avoid derogatory or diminishing terms, such as “weirdo,” “sick,” “deformed,” “lame,” “invalid,” “freak,” “spaz,” or “crippled.”

### **disease**

A **disorder** that is not a direct result of physical **injury** is a disease.

## **disorder**

When discussing medical conditions, a disorder is a physical or mental condition that is not considered healthy or otherwise **normal**.

## **Down Syndrome**

Down Syndrome is a congenital disability caused by the presence of an extra partial or full copy of chromosome 21. Always avoid derogatory terms like “Mongoloid.”

## **dwarfism**

Dwarfism is a **medical** or **genetic** condition resulting in a height of four feet or less. When used outside of a medical scope, “dwarf” is offensive, but “dwarfism” is the accepted term for the condition. The appropriateness of terms like “little person” or “little people” is disputed and offensive terms like “midget” should be avoided entirely.

## **dyslexia**

A **learning disability**, “dyslexia” is characterized by difficulties with identifying speech sounds and mapping those sounds to written language.

## **dysmorphia**

The term “dysmorphia” describes an abnormally shaped or sized part of the body. Several psychiatric **disorders** have elements of dysmorphia or perceived dysmorphia. A person experiencing a dysmorphic **disorder** may hyper-focus on the shape or size of a body part, thinking it is **abnormal**. For example, body dysmorphic disorder is a mental disorder characterized by an obsession with an aspect of personal appearance to the point of taking extreme measures to control personal appearance. Take care not to confuse this term with **dysphoria**.

## **dysphoria**

The term “dysphoria” is used to describe a general discomfort or distress. For instance, a person experiencing gender dysphoria experiences distress because their **gender identity** doesn’t align with their body or the **gender** they were assigned at **birth**. Note that dysphoria requires clinically significant distress: while gender dysphoria is a mental **disorder**, gender nonconformity is not.

## **embryo**

An embryo is a fertilized egg. In humans, this is any **pregnancy** up



to nine weeks post-conception (11 weeks gestational age). A “fetus” is a developing organism. Do not use “unborn child” or “unborn baby” unless the parent identifies them as such. For example, say, “the **woman** and her fetus were killed in the car accident.”

### **embryonic remains or fetal remains**

Embryonic or fetal remains are the product of a **pregnancy** that is not carried to term. Because many **pregnancies** are not sustained past the first **menstrual** period, this may include every **menstrual** discharge, if interpreted broadly.

### **experiencing**

After a **diagnosis**, there is a transition from experiencing something (passive) to it becoming a person’s new reality (active). A person may also experience bouts of pain and **flare-ups**.

### **Family and Medical Leave Act or FMLA**

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 is a U.S. law requiring employers to provide job protections and unpaid leave to employees for specific **medical** and family reasons.

### **flare-up**

When a person’s symptoms of a **disease** gets worse, that person is experiencing a flare-up.

### **freak**

Even if you self-deprecatingly want to refer to yourself as a control freak, don’t. Use “perfectionist.” Freak is derogatory and should be avoided.

### **functional need**

A functional need is an **adjustment** that a person with a **disability** requires to fully participate in an activity or undertaking. If a functional need is relevant to what you are writing, specify the **adjustment**, rather than the cause. For example, “the city pool added zero-barrier entry for **wheelchair** users.” It is not relevant why someone uses a **wheelchair**.

### **genes**

Genes are the basic units of heredity, the coded arrangement of nucleotides in the chains of chromosomes. Genes define the characteristics of living things and are copied from one generation to the next.

## **hair**

The thin strands growing from the skin of humans is known as “hair.” Do not ever describe a person’s hair as “nappy,” “wooly,” or “matted.” Terms like “kinky” have a mixed reception; in general, only use that term if a person specifically uses it. Avoid implying that hair requires “controlling” or is otherwise inappropriate. Because you don’t understand others’ hair doesn’t mean that there’s anything wrong with it.

## **hair loss**

Not everyone who goes through **chemotherapy** loses hair, as there are many types of formulated treatment. Everyone who goes through radiation **treatments** loses hair specifically in the area targeted by the radiation. Many medical conditions also cause hair loss or hair thinning. Do not make assumptions.

## **handicap(ped)**

See **disability**.

## **handicapable**

Avoid. An often despised word by those who are **disabled**.

## **health**

When a person’s mind and body functions typically or properly, that person is considered healthy.

## **homelessness**

A person who experiences homelessness does not have access to consistent stable housing. Homelessness can cover a broad set of situations, from staying with family to lacking access to any shelter at all. Homelessness status correlates to increased risks to a person’s **well-being** and safety, along with decreased access to healthcare services, along with any other services that typically require a permanent address.

## **hormones**

Hormones control how the body grows, develops, and ages. Generally, hormones are naturally produced in the body, but **replacement therapies** can supplement any desired hormone loss or change.

## **hormone replacement therapy or HRT**

Hormone replacement therapy is any form of treatment during which the patient receives **hormones**. HRT is used to control

**menopause**, to assist **transgender** people, and to treat a number of conditions resulting from a lack of naturally occurring **hormones**.

### **identity-first language**

An example of identity-first language is someone calling themselves **autistic**, rather than a person with **autism**. Some consider this reductivist: reducing a person to symptoms or diagnoses. Different communities prefer this approach to **person-first language**, so make sure to ask how someone prefers to be identified.

### **impaired**

See **disability**.

### **illness**

An illness is a condition that prevents the body or mind from performing internal functions correctly.

### **infertile**

Infertile is a **medical** term that indicates someone is unable to be a parent. In some cultures, this is deeply insulting, so don't use it unless it is relevant.

### **injury**

An injury is harm or hurt inflicted on the body, usually by an external force. An injury can be the result of an accident or another event. Refer to injuries as being "sustained" or "received," not "suffered."

### **inspiring**

When referring to someone with a medical condition, using this phrase can be perceived as you being unaware or insulting. Doing all you can to survive or live with a condition that others might not be able to imagine living through is everyday life. See also **suffering**.

### **intellectual disability**

A person experiencing an intellectual disability may experience limitations in adaptive behavior and intellectual functioning. Avoid using offensive or dehumanizing terms like "weak-minded" or "retarded."

### **intersex**

An intersex person is born with variations in their sex characteristics (including **chromosomes**, sex **hormones**, or genitals). Intersex people routinely face **stigmatization**, discrimination, and violence. Many medical professionals see intersex traits as **disorders** to

be cured (often through surgery, hormonal alteration, and **sterilization**), but are unable to provide evidence of improved outcomes as a result of these **treatments**. Such **treatment** is often non-consensual. Do not describe an intersex trait as a **disorder** unless referring to the proper name of a **medical diagnosis**. Avoid outdated and offensive terms for intersex people, including “hermaphrodite,” “congenital eunuch,” and “congenitally frigid.”

### **invisible**

Many people with a **disability** or **illness** can feel invisible because their needs are not taken into consideration because they are not “the norm.” Invisible also refers to those with not visually obvious **disabilities** or **illnesses**, whether psychological or anatomical.

### **interpersonal violence**

Interpersonal violence (IPV) is violence that occurs when one person uses physical, sexual, or emotional power and control over another. Domestic violence is an example of interpersonal violence. Avoid using terms that dismiss interpersonal violence such as “throw them under the bus.” See also **self-directed violence**.

### **lame**

Using this as a slang term to describe something passé or uncool reinforces this historically negative slur that refers to people or animals with an **injury** or **illness** affecting the leg or foot causing them to walk with a limp or modified gait.

### **learning disability**

A person with a learning disability experiences difficulties in acquiring knowledge or skills. Learning disabilities are often neurologically-based. Common learning disabilities include **dyslexia**, **Attention Deficit Disorder**, and **dyscalculia**.

### **less-abled**

Reception of terms like “less-abled” are mixed and different from community to community. People advocating for this term look to avoid referring to a person as **disabled**, because that can incorrectly imply that **disability** is a binary state.

### **lisp**

While some programmers may only know the term “lisp” as the name of a programming language, a person experiencing a lisp misarticulates sibilants (sounds like “s”).

## **malignant**

A condition that is malignant is considered serious and dangerous with a tendency to become progressively worse. Malignant cancer cells are much more likely to cause significant damage in a shorter time period than **benign** cells.

## **medication**

Medication is a substance used for **medical treatment**. Prescription medication requires a prescription, or statement allowing you access to that medication, to meet legal control requirements.

## **medicine or medical**

Medicine is the study and practice of **diagnosing**, treating, and preventing **disease, illness, and injury**. Medical professionals study and practice medicine.

## **medical cannabis**

Medical cannabis is cannabis prescribed as a **medical treatment**. The term “cannabis” is preferred over slang terms like “pot” or “weed.” Avoid “marijuana” both for medical and recreational usage due to its racist history.

## **menopause**

Menopause is when the body ceases to regulate the **menstrual** cycle.

## **menstruation**

Menstruation is the periodic discharge of blood and tissue from the lining of the uterus at intervals of roughly one lunar month.

## **mental health**

As a subset of **health**, mental health covers everything related to a person's mental well-being and brain function.

## **mental illness**

Mental illness is an umbrella term for a wide group of conditions that affect how a person may act or experience the world. Wherever possible, specify a mental illness when writing about a person experiencing mental illness. An estimated one in four adults experiences mental illness in a given year, though the symptoms and severity may vary widely. Unless specified or requested, use **person-first language**. Avoid using disparaging or diminishing terms like “crazy,” “whackjob,” “deranged,” or “insane,” even if referring to mental illness. Consider alternatives like “out-of-control” or “frantic.” Be careful using these terms even if a person refers to themselves in

this way: even if Carrie Fisher occasionally behaved in a way some people disapproved of, she and no one else should ever be called a whackjob in print, on TV, or on the internet. When referring to a medical facility specializing in caring for people with various mental illnesses, use “mental health hospital” or “psychiatric hospital.”

### **miscarriage**

A miscarriage is a **pregnancy** that ends before a live **birth**. Miscarriage is common, especially in early **pregnancy**.

### **mobility**

The ability to move or be moved freely and easily is known as mobility.

### **multiple sclerosis or MS**

Multiple sclerosis is a **disease** of the central nervous system with symptoms including numbness, vision problems, and trouble with balance.

### **muscular dystrophy or MD**

A symptom of more than 30 **genetic diseases**, muscular dystrophy is characterized by weakness and degeneration of muscles that control movement.

### **mute**

Muteness is used to describe only those who cannot physically speak. Otherwise, use **speech-impairment**.

### **neurodiversity**

The concept of neurodiversity recognizes neurological differences as representative variation in human brains. A person who is neurodivergent may have an autism spectrum disorder, experience **dyslexia**, or have symptoms of **Attention Deficit Disorder**.

### **non-responsive**

A person is non-responsive in the absence of consciousness or sensory response to stimuli. Avoid any terms that dehumanize a patient, such as “vegetable.”

### **normal**

A loaded word that the general public most likely never thought of as insulting to those who live with otherness. Behaviors and actions vary greatly depending on many factors, and what may be seen

as popular or dominant behaviors in one region may be completely different in another. In a medical context, normal and **abnormal** may be used to describe a test result. Both terms should be avoided when describing a person or their behavior.

### **obsessive-compulsive disorder or OCD**

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is an **anxiety disorder**. A person experiencing OCD has **anxiety** that leads to repetitive or ritualized behaviors. Avoid using OCD to describe a person who displays obsessive behavior, but who has not received a formal **diagnosis**.

### **other or otherness**

From a sociological perspective, othering is a process by which a person or a group is separated from what is considered **normal** (or the popular or dominant behavior) based on a characteristic. Individuals or groups pushed to the margins through othering are discriminated against consciously or unconsciously.

### **-parous**

This ending means “having given birth.” A person who has not given **birth** is nulliparous. A person who has given **birth** more than once is multiparous. This suffix is used especially in conversations about **birth control**.

### **patient**

A patient is a person currently receiving medical treatment. Avoid using “patient” to describe a person with a **disability**, as it can imply they currently need medical attention even if that is not the case.

### **permanent disability**

Primarily used in insurance or legal contexts, a person may be deemed to have a total or partial permanent disability. PPD refers to being able to return to a modified type of work, though usually it is lower-paying work. TPD refers to being unable to work in any occupation for which they are suited by training, education, or experience, being prevented from completing work or non-occupational activities for the remainder of their life. Avoid using this term outside of insurance and legal contexts.

### **person-first language**

An example is “she needs to eat a snack soon because she has **diabetes**” versus **identity-first language** that would call her a **diabetic**. By putting the person first, you do not reduce them to a **disease** or **disability** that they have had to manage or deal with.

## **physical health**

As a subset of health, physical health covers everything related to a person's physical **well-being** and bodily function.

## **pregnancy**

Pregnancy is the state of carrying an **embryo** or fetus. A pregnant person is not always female. A pregnant person is also not two people, so don't refer to the pregnant person as “mother” or “expectant mother” unless they use that term themselves. Especially in professional situations, many pregnant people prefer not to talk about their pregnancy. Treat it as you would any other visible medical condition.

## **pro-abortion rights**

A person who is pro-abortion rights supports **abortion** access with limited controls. Avoid the term “pro-choice.” The discussion of **abortion** rights does not fall along a binary: a person can be pro-abortion rights while advocating on certain limitations on **abortion**. See also **anti-abortion rights**.

## **post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD**

An **anxiety disorder**, PTSD is generally caused by experience of an extremely emotional traumatic event. Events known to cause PTSD include (but are not limited to) war, natural disasters, **interpersonal violence** (including sexual assault), car accidents, and imprisonment. A person experiencing PTSD may be **triggered** into a flashback or other **anxiety**-sparked response by noise or movement.

## **refugee**

A person is a refugee if they've been forced to leave their home, typically for another country, in order to escape persecution, conflict, natural disaster, or other threats on their life. Refugee status correlates to increased risks to a person's **well-being** and safety, along with decreased access to services, including healthcare, citizenship, and permanent housing.

## **remission**

A **disease** is in remission when symptoms get better or disappear, as verified by blood tests, scans, and other types of medical testing.

## **scoliosis**

A person who has scoliosis experiences a lateral curvature of their spine, which is discovered most often during a growth spurt around the age of puberty.



### **seeing eye dog**

Refer to dogs and other animal helpers as a **service animal** or **assistance animal**. Avoid the term “Seeing Eye dog,” as “Seeing Eye” is a registered trademark of The Seeing Eye school in Morristown, N.J.

### **self-advocate**

Where a person with a **disorder**, **illness**, or other **disability** has to request or demand services or treatments from their medical providers, after doing research, because a suggested **treatment** option was not in their best interest.

### **self-directed violence**

Self-directed violence includes **suicide** and cutting. For people who struggle with images of death and themselves dying every day, and frequently consider taking their own life or have attempted it, hearing casual or dismissive references to self-directed violence is harmful. Avoid phrases like “I would die” if you’re embarrassed, if you get passed over for a promotion, etc. Similarly, avoid terms like “career suicide.”

### **service animal or assistance animal**

A service animal is trained, while an assistance animal may provide emotional support. Both types provide a range of service to people with both **visible** and **invisible disabilities**. A majority of service animals are dogs but other species are also used. The **ADA** includes legal definitions of service animals under federal law.

### **sexually transmitted infection or STI**

An infection or **disease** transmitted through **sex** or sharing bodily fluids, is described as a sexually transmitted infection. Some STIs can also be spread through non-sexual means, including during blood transfusions or from a parent to an **embryo** during a **pregnancy**.

### **sterilization**

Any medical **treatment** that intentionally leaves a patient unable to sexually reproduce at the end of the **treatment**. While people may opt for sterilization as a personal choice, it has been forced on members of marginalized populations across the world. In the history of the U.S., people who are **disabled**, people who are not **White**, people who are **intersex**, and people who are **transgender** have experienced non-consensual sterilization and, in some cases, may continue to face non-consensual sterilization today.

## **stigma**

Social stigma is extreme disapproval of a person or a group based on perceived characteristics used to distinguish or **other** that individual or groups from a dominant society.

## **suffering**

Avoid the term “suffering.” Use neutral language to describe a person with a **disability**. Don’t assume that anyone is a victim, is suffering, or is stricken. See also **inspiring** and **well-being**.

## **suicide**

**Self-directed violence** resulting in death is a suicide. While some dictionaries allow the use of “suicide” as a noun defined as a person who commits or attempts suicide, avoid this usage. Avoid language that minimizes suicide, such as “just shoot me” or “talk me off the ledge.”

## **Tourette syndrome**

Tourette syndrome is a neuropsychiatric **disorder** that affects a person’s motor and vocal abilities, causing tics. It is part of a spectrum of tic **disorders**. Tourette syndrome, along with other tics, do not affect intelligence and you should avoid suggesting any sort of connection.

## **trans-vaginal ultrasound**

A trans-vaginal ultrasound is an internal examination, given by inserting an ultrasound wand into the vagina. In addition to testing for cysts, fibroids, pelvic pain, and unusual bleeding, this method is much more likely than external ultrasound to detect very early **pregnancy**. However, it’s also significantly more invasive as it involves vaginal penetration.

## **treatment**

A treatment is a **medical** intervention. It includes the treatment of **addiction**. When discussing addiction treatment, use “treatment center” and avoid terms like “rehab” or “detox.”

## **trigger**

A trigger is a situation, topic, or media that a person may find highly traumatic, numbing, **anxiety**-inducing, or otherwise extremely difficult to experience. This can affect survivors of abuse, service members who saw active combat, war survivors, and others who experienced first-hand violence or an imminent threat thereof. For example, a military veteran may be reminded of traumatic

experiences by sounds similar to gunfire (like fireworks or backfiring engines), triggering **anxiety**, hyper-realistic flashbacks, and other responses.

### **trigger warning**

See **content warning**.

### **visible disability**

A visible disability is generally noticeable upon cursory visual observation. Visible disabilities are sometimes indicated by **adjustments**, rather than **disabilities** themselves: a person wearing glasses or using a **wheelchair** has a visible disability, even if an observer does not know why that person wears glasses or uses a **wheelchair**.

### **vitiligo**

Vitiligo is a condition that results in skin cells losing pigmentation. It manifests as a lightening of segments of the skin, especially extremities, including the face, hands and arms. This is not restricted to skin only, and other medical conditions affecting organs can occur from the cell changes.

### **well-being**

Well-being is a general term for the condition of a person or a group, including health, comfort, and emotional state.

### **wheelchair**

Wheelchair should be used to describe the mobility device only. Use person-first language, and do not use “wheelchair-bound” or “confined to a wheelchair” to describe a person. A person who uses a wheelchair may refer to themselves as a user or a wheeler. Preserve the reference but explain the context of the term.

### **X chromosome**

The X chromosome is one of two sex chromosomes found in DNA. Often, but not exclusively, female cells have two X chromosomes present. Male cells often, but not exclusively, have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. There are many other variations on these combinations that occur in humans, as well as variation in how these **genes** are expressed.

### **Y chromosome**

The Y chromosome is one of two sex chromosomes found in DNA. See **X chromosome**.



# RELIGION

Whether one is born to a religious identity passed down from generations and chooses to stay in that religion of origin, convert to another religion, or reject religion altogether, there is an awareness and appreciation of religious correctness. When writing or speaking about a religion you have an opportunity to be respectful and have an expanded level of awareness. This is a list of a few terms and references that as of this date, reflect the current religious understanding and knowledge of this rabbi.

Because many words in this section are drawn from languages other than English, pronunciations are included for commonly mispronounced terms. Pronunciations listed in this section use the International Phonetic Alphabet.

— *Rabbi Anat Moskowitz*

## **Abrahamic religion**

An umbrella term used to refer to religions that claim descent from the religions of the ancient **Hebrews**, Abrahamic religions include **Judaism**, **Christianity**, **Islam**, and the **Bahá'í Faith**. The term refers to Abraham, the shared patriarch of all Abrahamic religions.

## **agnostic**

A person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena; a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God.

## **agnosticism**

There are two basic forms of agnosticism. The weak form claims that God is not known. This view holds onto the possibility that God may be known. The strong form of agnosticism claims that God is unknowable. This form says God cannot be known by anyone.

## **angel**

An angel is a spiritual being superior to humans. Angels are found in many religions but are especially associated with **Abrahamic religions**.

## **animism**

Animism is the belief that everything has a soul or spirit, an *anima* in **Latin**, including animals, plants, rocks, mountains, rivers, and

stars. Animists believe each **anima** is a powerful spirit that can help or hurt them and are to be worshipped, feared or attended to. Animists offer sacrifices, **prayers**, dances, or other forms of devotions to these spirits in hopes of blessing upon areas of life (crops, health, fertility, etc.) or for protection from harm.

### **anti-Semitism**

Anti-Semitism is hostility, prejudice, or discrimination directed against **Jews** because they are **Jewish**. A person who holds such positions is called an anti-Semite. Anti-Semitism can take the form of political efforts to isolate, oppress, or injure **Jews**. It can also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about **Jews**. Common manifestations of anti-Semitism include blood libel (the accusation of ritually kidnapping and murdering children of **Christians**), well poisoning, and host desecration (the accusation of defiling bread sanctified for use in **Christian** rituals).

### **Arabic**

Arabic is usually ranked among the top six of the world's major languages. As the language of the Qur'an, the holy book of **Islam**, it is also widely used throughout the Muslim world. It belongs to the Semitic group of languages which also includes **Hebrew** and Amharic, the main language of Ethiopia.

### **atheism**

Atheism is a rejection of the assertion that there are gods. Atheism is not a disbelief in gods or a denial of gods; it is a lack of belief in gods. Atheism is not a **religion**, although there are some religions that are atheistic, such as certain sects of **Buddhism**. Other identifying terms like **agnosticism**, **secularism**, or free-thinking can fall under the umbrella of the term "atheism," but atheists do not have a common belief system, sacred scripture, or clergy. The only connecting statement is that the assertion that gods or a singular God exist has left the atheist unconvinced. When describing **humanists**, Unitarian Universalists, and members of other inclusive movements, do not assume they are atheist.

### **Bahá'í**

Pronounced bəhai, the word Bahá'í is used either as an adjective to refer to the Bahá'í Faith or as a term for a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. The word is not a noun meaning the religion as a whole. It is derived from the **Arabic** Bahá' (بهاء) meaning "glory" or "splendor." The Bahá'í Faith is a **monotheistic** religion. There are no **clergy**: the faith's affairs are administered by a network of democratically

elected councils. The terms Bahaism and Bahaist are incorrect: use the Bahá'í Faith to refer to the religion and Bahá'í to refer to an adherent. Belief in the Manifestations (Messengers) of Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad explain that the religions of the world are all connected and come from the same Source. All religions are in essence successive chapters in the one religion from God.

### **Before the Common Era or B.C.E.**

See **Common Era**.

### **Bible Belt**

An informally described region in the southeast and south-central U.S., the Bible Belt is an area where conservative **evangelical** Protestantism plays a strong role outside of religious life.

### **Buddhism**

Originating in Ancient **India** between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.E, Buddhism includes a variety of traditions. Practices may vary from country to country and school to school. Two major branches of Buddhism are Theravada and Mahayana. Theravada Buddhists work towards Nirvana, an escape from the cycle of suffering and rebirth. Mahayana Buddhists follow a path where one remains in the cycle of rebirth to help others reach awakening. Tibetan Buddhism is a branch of the Mahayana tradition that includes local shamanistic practices and other Tibetan religious influences.

### **cantor**

In **Judaism**, a **synagogue** official who leads the musical part of a service. A cantorial soloist officiates in much the same way as a cantor but is not vested (ordained from schooling in a cantorial program). Other religions employ cantors, but typically on an informal basis and without requiring **ordination**. Capitalize before a name, but lowercase otherwise.

### **Christianity**

Christianity is based on the person and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. As a whole, Christianity is a **monotheistic religion**. There are many distinct denominations and **churches** within the whole of Christianity. These denominations are typically categorized as Western, Eastern, and Nontrinitarian.

Western and Eastern Christianity are divided by multiple ecclesiastical differences and theological arguments between

Greek (or East) and Latin (or West) church leaders. The divide was formalized in 1054 C.E. during the Great Schism. Western Christianity is more prevalent in the U.S. and Europe, and includes both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Eastern Christianity, or Eastern Orthodoxy, as it is also known, includes the Orthodox Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church. Nontrinitarian Christian denominations include the **Church of Latter-day Saints** and **Jehovah's Witnesses**. When possible, identify a person's denomination.

## **Christmas**

Christmas is an annual **festival** commemorating the birth of Jesus. In **Western Christianity** it is traditionally celebrated on December 25. While it probably dates back as early as 200 C.E., the **festival** did not become widespread until the Middle Ages. In the U.S, it is commemorated in a mostly **secular** manner with a focus on gifts, decorations including the tree (varied origins), and Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas is the **saint** who serves as a role model for gift-giving).

In **Eastern Christianity**, Christmas Day is celebrated on or near January 7 to remember Jesus Christ's birth. This is practiced in countries such as Belarus, Egypt, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Russia, and the Ukraine. Some countries, such as Armenia, observe Christmas Day on January 6. The January 7 celebration of Christmas Day is not a nationwide public holiday in countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, or the United States.

Note that there are at least 14 different holidays, celebrations, and commemorations of different religious backgrounds during December. Avoid referring to any of them as "Jewish Christmas," "Muslim Christmas," or any variation. Each holiday is completely different.

## **church**

Often, the word "church" is only understood as a building for public **Christian** worship, but there are other uses of the word as well. The word is used in reference to a particular **Christian** organization with its own particular doctrines, **clergy** and buildings such as "the Church of England." The word "church" is also used to refer to an institutionalized religion as a political or social force such as "the separation of church and state." The word can also refer to the hierarchy of **clergy** within a particular **Christian** Church in the sentence: Teri is entering the Church as a pastor.



## clergy

The formal leaders within a **religion** are described as clergy, while non-clergy are described as **lay people**. Typically, becoming a cleric requires advanced education as well as **ordination**. The responsibilities of a cleric vary across religious traditions, but typically include providing education and leading rituals. Members of the clergy include **imams**, **rabbis**, and **priests**.

## Common Era or C.E.

The Common Era (or Current Era) year-numbering system is used for the **Gregorian calendar**, as well as for the Julian calendar it replaced. Events taking place before 1 C.E. are noted as "**Before the Common Era**" or **B.C.E.** The Common Era system is numerically equivalent to the Dionysian era system (which labeled dates as *anno Domini* or "the year of the Lord" and "before Christ"). Therefore 2017 C.E. corresponds A.D. 2017 and 2000 B.C.E. corresponds to 2000 B.C. The Common Era system is secular and preferred over the Dionysian era system, which is tied to **Christianity**.

## cult

A cult is a social group defined by spiritual or religious beliefs. Typically, the word "cult" is used in a negative sense (including to describe international organizations with millions of members) and should be avoided. In particular, the term "cult" is often seen within propaganda created with political intent. Within sociological study, the term "cult" has specific technical meaning related to the study of religious behavior.

## Daoism

Daoism, pronounced 'daʊ.ɪzəm, is a philosophical and religious tradition that originated in China before the fourth century B.C.E. Daoist texts include the *Dao Te Ching* and the **I Ching**.

## diaspora

Diaspora (pronounced daɪ.æspə.ɹə) refers to the scattering or dispersion of population whose origin lies within a smaller geographic locale. The term "diaspora" can also refer to the movement of the population from its original homeland. Jews living outside of the state of Israel are described as part of the Jewish Diaspora. It was first used to describe how Jews were forced to scatter after the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C.E. Do not capitalize unless referring to a specific diaspora, such as the Jewish Diaspora or the African Diaspora.

## **divination**

Divination refers to a number of different methods used to gain insight into the future or other unknowns. Many **religions** prohibit some forms of divination while codifying others into law. Methods of divination are diverse. Some of the more common methods include astrology, numerology, and tracking omens.

## **Easter**

Easter is an annual **Christian** holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Also known as Pascha in **Eastern Christian** traditions, Easter is linked to **Pesach** through symbolism and timing. Easter is a moveable **feast**: it does not fall on a fixed date in the **Gregorian calendar**, but is instead scheduled based on a lunisolar calendar. Easter is preceded by Lent, a 40-day period of penance. Most **Christians** call the week before Easter “Holy Week,” though the names for individual days can differ between denominations.

## **evangelism**

Evangelism is the preaching of the story of Jesus of Nazareth or the practice of proselytizing a particular doctrine or set of beliefs to others with the intention of converting others to **Christianity**. Many **Christian** denominations place a high value on evangelism in an effort to provide **salvation** to non-Christians, whether or not those non-Christians are currently members of a religion or otherwise seeking **salvation** for themselves.

## **fasting**

In many religions, fasting (or **abstaining**) from food or drink is observed during certain holidays. Fasting is also commonly used as a purification ritual. Some people may also fast for medical reasons.

## **feast or festival**

Many religions observe holidays with food, song, and other celebrations. For many religious calendars, the distinction between feasts and festivals may be specific and technical. Where possible, provide additional context.

## **fundamentalism**

When used in a religious context, fundamentalism refers to an unwavering belief in a set of fundamental (or otherwise basic and unchanging) rules. Fundamentalism is found across a variety of religions. It is particularly common in **Abrahamic religions**, where fundamentalism is often characterized by a strict adherence

to a literal interpretation of religious texts. Fundamentalist interpretations often focus on othering specific groups of people and either requiring them to conform to such interpretations or removing them from the religious community.

### **Gregorian calendar**

The Gregorian calendar is the most widely used civil calendar system in the world and is treated as a global standard. The calendar is named after Pope Gregory XIII who introduced it in 1582 C.E. to reform the Julian calendar used across **Christian** countries and communities at that time. The last European country to adopt the Gregorian calendar was Greece, in 1923. Many (though not all) countries that use other calendars have adopted the Gregorian calendar for civil and standardization purposes.

### **Hajj**

The Hajj is an annual pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims are expected to complete the Hajj at least once in their lifetime, provided they are physically and financially capable. The Hajj takes place during Dhu al-Hijjah, the last month of the Islamic calendar. Eid al-Adha falls on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah and is part of the Hajj. The holiday marks **Abraham**'s willingness to sacrifice his son.

### **halal**

In **Arabic**, halal simply means “permissible or allowed.” It's pronounced hoh-l. While halal guidelines include dietary restrictions, travel, clothing, and even financial products can be halal. Within **Islamic** tradition, to make meat halal or permissible, an animal must be slaughtered in a ritual way, making it fit to eat according to **Islamic** religious law. Not all food, or other items, can be halal. Items that cannot be halal are considered *haram* (unlawful or forbidden).

### **Hanukkah**

Meaning “dedication” in **Hebrew**, Hanukkah refers to the eight-day celebration during which Jews commemorate the victory of the Maccabees over the armies of Syria in 165 B.C.E. and the subsequent liberation and rededication of the **Temple** in Jerusalem. The modern celebration of Hanukkah centers around: the lighting of the *hanukkiyah* (a special menorah or candelabra for Hanukkah), foods prepared in oil (commemorating the miracle of the oil that lasted eight days instead of just one) including *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts), special songs, and the *dreidel* game. Because Hanukkah is a transliteration from the Hebrew חֲנֻכָּה, spellings such as “Chanukah” are common.

## Hebrew

Hebrew is the Semitic language of the Hebrews in ancient or modern form. Hebrew is the national language of the modern state of Israel and is the language of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) and the Tanakh (the Jewish Bible including Prophets, Judges and Writings). Yiddish is a language that uses elements from both German and Hebrew that is written using the Hebrew alphabet. Ladino is a language that uses elements from both Spanish and Hebrew. Hebrews (pluralized) refers to the ancient people residing in what is presently Israel and Palestine, descended from Jacob, grandson of Abraham. After the Exodus (circa 1300 B.C.E.), the Hebrews established the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and their scriptures and traditions form the basis of **Judaism**.

## heresy

Holding a belief that is contrary to a **religion's** dogma is considered heresy within that **religion**. In countries with governance based in **religion**, limitations on heretical opinions may be law.

## Hinduism

Often described as the world's oldest **religion**, Hinduism originated on the **Indian** subcontinent. Hinduism incorporates a range of philosophies, which are interconnected through shared rituals, cosmologies, and texts. Major Hindu scriptures include the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Agamas*. A follower of Hinduism is a Hindu.

## Holocaust

The term “holocaust” means destruction or slaughter on a mass scale, especially caused by fire or nuclear war. The word is used to refer to the mass murder of Jews under the German Nazi regime during the period 1941–45. More than six million European Jews as well as members of other groups such as **Roma**, Catholics, communists, people with **disabilities**, **LGBTQIA** people, and any opposition to the Nazi party were murdered at concentration camps, including Auschwitz. As a singular proper noun, use “the Holocaust.” In Hebrew, the Holocaust is known as the Shoah (pronounced [ʃoʊ.ə]).

## humanism

Humanists follow a philosophy that emphasizes the value of all people, both individually and collectively. Most modern humanist movements are considered **secular** or **atheistic**.

## imam

Pronounced *imām*, this is the clerical title of a religious leader in **Islam**. The term “imam” can also reference a political leader. One does not need to be an imam to lead **prayers**. Traditionally, only **men** have been imams, although **women** are allowed to serve as **imams** for other women. Many Shiites believe imams are intercessors with God; many also believe in the Twelve Imams, descendants of Prophet Muhammad whom they consider his rightful successors. In first reference, capitalize “imam” when preceding a proper name. On second reference, use only the person’s last name. Capitalize the term when referencing the Twelve Imams.

## intercalation

In timekeeping, the insertion of an intercalary period is used to make a calendar conform to seasons, solar phases, lunar phases, or standardizations.

## Islam

Islam is a **monotheistic religion** revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah. Followers of Islam are known as Muslims. Islam does not have a formal hierarchy or **clergy**. Leaders are informal and gain influence through study to become a scholar of Islamic texts, laws, and traditions, called **shari'a**. The Sunni tradition has placed great emphasis on the role of **religion** in public and political life with great weight placed on **shari'a** as the standard for a broad range of social issues—**marriage, divorce**, inheritance, commerce, and so on. An adherent of Islam is a Muslim. When referring to details related to Islam, use “Islamic” as an adjective. Where possible, specify the branch of Islam. There are two major branches of Islam tradition: Sunni Islam and Shi'a Islam. Both “Sunni” and “Shi'a” are proper nouns. While “Sunni” can also be used as an adjective, “Shiite” is the adjective form of “Shi'a.” There are also other branches or denominations of Islam, including Ahmadiyya and Ibadi Islam. Some branches, including Ahmadiyya, are persecuted as non-Muslims by other denominations of Islam.

The followers of Sunni Islam make up more than 80 percent of the Muslim population in the world. The Sunni are the majority in most Islamic countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Afghanistan, and Somalia. “Sunnah” is translated as the “trodden path,” “the way,” “example,” or “habitual practice” and refers to the example set by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. The Sunni and Shi'a both trace their differences to the seventh century C.E., when disagreements over the successor to the Prophet Muhammad arose.

The Sunni maintain that the Muslim community was to select the Prophet's successor (caliph) to lead, whereas the Shi'a believe the Prophet chose his son-in-law, Ali, to be his successor. Although Sunnis and Shi'as agree on many theological and practical matters, the Sunni are typically seen as putting more emphasis on the power of God and his determination of human fate and are often understood to be more inclusive in their definition of what it means to be a Muslim. As in every religion, there are different levels of observance in Islam, from the **fundamentalist** adhering to the strictest level of the law to those living in modernity with interpretation of Islam to modern living.

### Islamophobia

Prejudice against **Islam**, fear of, or unfounded hostility towards Muslims, often applied as a political force, is known as Islamophobia.

### Jainism

Jainism originated on the **Indian** subcontinent. It is an ancient **religion** dating to at least the second century B.C.E. A practitioner of Jainism is described as a Jain.

### Jehovah's Witnesses

A **Christian** denomination based in the U.S., Charles Taze Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses in the late 1870s. Jehovah's Witnesses are differentiated from other **Christian** denominations by their practices, including not observing certain holidays, refusing blood transfusions, and refusing military service.

### Judaism

Judaism is the **monotheistic religion** of the Jewish people, the Israelites of the Bible, and the Jews of today. It is based on the teachings of the *Torah*. Jewish believers are able to sanctify their lives and draw closer to God through the action of fulfilling *mitzvot* (commandments). There are several denominations of Judaism often referred to as movements. The differences between the movements are delineated by how literally each movement views the scriptures and how much they think *mitzvot* can be changed, adjusted, and evolved to meet modernity.

The Reform (Reformation) movement developed in Germany in the early 19th century as European Jews sought to integrate into a mainstream society that was increasingly available to them politically and socially. In the U.S., the Reform movement became

known for its relaxation of ritual overall, preferring to stress the Torah's teachings on ethics.

Conservative Judaism, originally known as “Historical Judaism,” began in the mid-19th century as a response to the Reform movement. Conservatives focused on the Westernization of Judaism in the areas of education and culture (e.g., embracing modern dress), but kept the use of **Hebrew** in the liturgy, the observance of dietary laws and the **Sabbath**, and almost all Torah rituals. In the 1980s, Conservative Jews decided to admit **women** as **rabbis**. Conservative Judaism is considered the middle-of-the-road Jewish movement as it grapples with conserving the tradition of Judaism while navigating the realities of modernity. Reconstructionist Judaism was founded in 1922 in the U.S. by Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan and comes out of the Conservative movement. It evolved as an effort to adapt classical Judaism to current ideas on science, art, and reason. Reconstructionist Judaism views itself as an evolving civilization rather than a religion, and reject the notion of a personal deity.

Orthodox Judaism retains traditional Jewish laws and customs, not only as they relate to liturgy but also to diet, dress, and ritual. Those laws include separation of **men** and **women** during worship: **women** are not allowed to lead services and face other role restrictions that are at odds with social changes sought by **feminism**. The Hasidic sects comprise a significant segment of Orthodox Judaism — all Hasidim are Orthodox, but not all Orthodox are Hasidic.

### **kosher**

The literal **Hebrew** translation for “kosher” is “ritually fit” or “appropriate.” A *Torah* (scroll of the Five Books of Moses) can be non-kosher if it is torn or words are incomplete, worn off, or destroyed. However, the word “kosher” usually refers to food that is suitable for observant Jews to eat. There are three categories of kosher foods: meat, dairy, and neutral. Observant Jews keep meat and dairy foods separate, as well as require all kosher meat to be ritually butchered. Packaged foods must have a kosher symbol (the *hashgacha*) on them that indicates the rabbinic supervision required in the production of the food item. Different Jews practice different levels of kashrut (keeping kosher).

### **Latin**

Originally the language spoken in the Roman Republic, Latin was adopted as the language of the Roman Catholic Church. While Latin served as the language of international communication for politics,



science, and other purposes through the 18th century, most fluent Latin speakers today are students, scholars, and members of the Roman Catholic **clergy**.

### **Latter-day Saints or L.D.S.**

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are referred to as Latter-day Saints. The term “Mormon” should be avoided. Founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, the L.D.S. church is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah.

### **lay person**

A member of the laity, rather than the **clergy** (such as **priests**, ministers, or **rabbis**). The terms “lay person” and “lay people” are each two words and are preferred. “Layman” and “laywoman,” however, are each one word.

### **lunar calendar**

A date system based upon cycles of the moon’s phases (synodic months, i.e., complete cycles of phases of the moon), the lunar calendar is usually described in contrast to **solar calendars** based solely upon the solar year. A purely lunar calendar is also distinguished from lunisolar calendars whose lunar months are brought into alignment with the solar year through some process of **intercalation**. The details of when months begin vary from calendar to calendar, with some using new, full, or crescent moons and others employing detailed calculations. Lunar calendars remain in use among some religious groups today. The Jewish calendar, which dates from 3,760 years and three months B.C.E., is one example of a lunisolar calendar. The Jewish religious year begins in autumn and consists of 12 months alternating between 30 and 29 days. It allows for a periodic intercalary month. The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar that dates from the Hegira — July 15, 622 C.E, the day on which the Prophet Muhammad began his migration from Mecca to Medina. As the Islamic calendar is lunar, holidays like **Ramadan** have different dates in each year of the **Gregorian calendar**.

### **Lunar New Year**

The Lunar New Year is the first day of a year in a **lunar calendar**. It is observed by a variety of **religions** and cultures. Chinese New Year, Korean New Year (Seollal), Vietnamese New Year (Tết), Mongolian New Year (Tsagaan Sar), and Tibetan New Year (Losar) are all celebrations of the Lunar New Year.



### **meditation**

Meditation is the practice of training one's mind or inducing specific modes of consciousness. While meditation may be practiced without religious meaning, many **religions** include meditative practices to be performed alone or with co-religionists. Meditation is also used in a medical context in order to improve both mental and physical **well-being**.

### **missionary**

A member of a religious group who proselytizes to a community with the goal of bringing new converts to their religion. Many missionaries also perform ministries of services (including education and economic development). Missionaries are typically **lay people**. Many **Christian** denominations routinely rely on missionaries to **evangelize**. Some denominations, including the **Latter-Day Saints**, require all members of the denomination to perform some level of missionary service.

### **monotheism**

Monotheism is the doctrine or belief that there is only one God.

### **mosque**

A mosque is a place of worship for followers of **Islam**.

### **mythology**

Mythology refers to the collected myths or stories of a group of people, or to the study of such myths. Myths are the stories told in order to explain nature, history, and customs. Avoid referring to a person's **religion** as a mythology. Some modern companies refer to their own histories and customs as "mythologies," although this usage can create problematic connotations.

### **Neo-Pagan**

Neo-Paganism is a contemporary form of **Paganism** (post-1800 C.E.). Neo-Pagans are a community of faiths bringing ancient Pagan traditions to the modern age, including Wicca, Druidism, Asatru, Shamanism, neo-**Native American**, and more. Neo-Pagan is an umbrella term for various and diverse beliefs with many elements in common. Some Neo-Pagans congruently practice other faiths such as **Christianity** or **Judaism**. Neo-Paganism is also defined by the belief that nature is sacred, and can be referred to as "earth-based," "earth-centered," or a "nature-religion." Some forms of Neo-Paganism and modern Shamanism also incorporate elements of technology

and other human-made materials. Some Neo-Pagan belief systems culturally appropriate rituals, especially from **Native American** religions.

Neo-Pagans do not worship **Satan** and do not even acknowledge his existence. Their belief system often contains a pantheon of gods and goddesses. However, none of them is an all-evil deity even remotely like the Satan found in **Christianity** and **Islam**. Be wary of writing about Neo-Paganism in a way that appropriates terms or concepts from other **religions** or cultures.

### **ordination**

The formal process for becoming **clergy** in a given **religion** is known as ordination. The ceremonies and requirements for ordination vary across **religions** and denominations.

### **orthodox**

Orthodoxy is the concept of following accepted norms or laws. See also **Christianity** and **Judaism**.

### **Pagan**

The term “Pagan” is derived from the **Latin** *paganus*, which translates roughly to “hick from the sticks.” It was originally used to describe people who lived in rural areas. As **Christianity** spread, those country folk were often the last holdouts clinging to their old religions and were labeled as “Pagan.” Therefore, it came to mean people who didn’t worship the god of Abraham. Today, paganism is an umbrella term applied to a number of different earth-based faiths. Wicca falls under the term of Pagan and although all Wiccans are Pagans, not all Pagans are Wiccans. Some witches (see **witchcraft**) are Pagans, and some are not, and likewise some Pagans practice **witchcraft**, while others choose not to. There is a **Christian** Witch movement made up of people who embrace the **Christian** God as well as a Wiccan goddess. There are also people who practice Jewish mysticism, or “Jewitchery,” and **atheist** witches who practice magic but do not follow a deity. See also **Neo-Pagan**.

References to Pagans and Paganism in the **Christian** Bible and in Judeo-Christian texts are universally negative and often contain references to human sacrifice and **Satan** worship. These passages were partly responsible for the witch-hunts and subsequent executions of non-**Christians** during the Middle Ages and Renaissance periods. Avoid reinforcing these negative connotations.

## **Pascha**

Pronounced 'pas.k<sup>h</sup>a. See **Easter**.

## **Pesach**

Pesach (pronounced 'pe.sax) is the **Hebrew** word for the Jewish holiday of Passover, because God passed over the Jewish homes when killing the Egyptian firstborn on the first Passover eve. The eight-day **festival** (seven days in Israel) of Passover is celebrated in the early spring beginning on the full moon, typically falling in March or April. This holiday commemorates the emancipation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. It is observed by avoiding leavened food items such as bread and any food that rises from yeast or fermentation; it instead focuses on the flat, unleavened bread that symbolizes poverty and the lack of time needed for bread to rise as the Israelites departed Egypt. Pesach is highlighted by the Seder meals that include four cups of wine, eating matzah, bitter herbs, and other symbolic foods that enhance the retelling the story of the Exodus.

## **polytheism**

The term “polytheism” denotes a theological system in which multiple spirit beings are worshiped. Those beings may include gods, goddesses, semi-divine beings, good or evil spirits, or the spirits of departed ancestors. There may be an established and recognized hierarchy of worshipped beings or they may be seen to act independently. They may work in conjunction with one another or at cross purposes. Polytheism characterizes the beliefs of **Hinduism**, Mahayana **Buddhism**, Confucianism, **Daoism**, Shintoism, and tribal religions around the world.

## **prayer**

Prayer is a method of requesting divine help or offering thanks to a divine being, performed either individually or as part of a group. Prayers may follow a strict liturgy or an informal format.

## **predestination**

The concept that all things, including personal actions have been already determined in some way by God. Some branches of **Christianity** rely on this idea to demonstrate that some people are **sinner**s and will go to hell regardless of their individual intents or efforts. Taken to an extreme, predestination is in conflict with free will, our ability to make individual choices without external forces affecting them.

## priest

A priest is an ordained religious leader. Depending on the **religion** a priest follows, they may be authorized to act as a mediator between humans and deities. Religious leaders in several **Christian** denominations are known as priests, including in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches. In ancient Israel, priests were responsible for performing religious rituals. Modern **Judaism** does not ordain priests, however.

## rabbi

Pronounced ˈrɒbi, rabbi is the **Hebrew** word for teacher and the title used by Jewish **clergy**. Traditionally only **men** held the title of rabbi, but now **women** in the Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Jewish Renewal movements are ordained from all rabbinical schools and hold the same title and position as traditionally held by **men**. In the Orthodox movement, **women** are being ordained to work with **women** only or to be teachers, and serve in leadership roles that do not conflict with the prohibition to hear the voice of a **woman** (such as singing) or be led by someone not obligated to certain commandments. Capitalize the title before the cleric's last name. Rabbi can also be used as a title with a first name depending on the relationship with the cleric. Rav is the title used in Israel and in some Jewish circles. Rebbe is a title used in Yiddish and Eastern European traditions. Rabba is used to describe a cleric who is a woman working in Israel.

## Ramadan

Pronounced ˌræməˈdɑːn, Ramadan is **Islam's** holy month, during which Muslims fast from dawn to sundown. Most Muslims fast for 11 to 16 hours. Because day length differs in polar regions, some Muslims may follow Mecca time for fasts. Ramadan commemorates the time during which the faithful believe Allah sent the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad in Mecca and gave him the teachings of the Qur'an. The end of Ramadan is marked by Eid al-Fitr. Because Islam follows a **lunar calendar**, Ramadan's position on the **Gregorian calendar** shifts each year.

## Rastafarianism

A relatively recent religious movement, Rastafarianism grew out of a convergence of religious and cultural movements in Jamaica in the 1930s. Rastas, as practitioners of Rastafarianism are described, advocate for a return to Africa for the African **Diaspora** and recognize Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia as the returned messiah (though Haile Selassie was an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian throughout his life).

## religion

Religion entails the practice of observing and adhering to a certain dogma or belief system. In comparison, **spirituality** places less importance on intellectual beliefs and is concerned with growing into and experiencing a divine consciousness.

## religious conversion

The process by which a person, formally or informally, becomes a member of a given faith or **religious** practice. In **Christianity**, this commonly includes the sacrament of baptism, wherein a person's **sins** are physically and symbolically washed away. Not all **religions** include a recognition of converts or a conversion process.

## Rosh Hashanah

Pronounced ˌɹɔʃ həˈʃɑːnə, Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, celebrated according to the **Hebrew** calendar sometime between the middle of September and the middle of October. There are four Jewish New Years in total. Rosh Hashanah is specifically the celebration of the birth of the world and is commemorated by hearing the sound of the shofar, eating apples and honey (sweet year), round challah, honey cake, and exchanging New Year cards. Rosh Hashanah also begins the 10 days of repentance ending with **Yom Kippur**.

## Sabbath or Shabbat

The day of the week observed for rest and worship. Most **Christian** traditions observe the Sabbath on Sunday. Seventh-day Adventists as well as Jews observe the Sabbath on Saturday. In **Judaism**, the word Shabbat (**Hebrew**, pronounced ʃəbˈɑt) or Shabbos (Yiddish) is used and is a 25-hour day from sunset on Friday to an hour after sunset on Saturday. Orthodox, some Conservative, and Traditional Jews refrain from working, driving, using electricity, and other activities that are considered work. Muslims observe a day of prayer on Friday that is often categorized as a sabbath day. Capitalize in religious references but lowercase when talking about periods of rest.

## salvation

Also called “deliverance” or “redemption,” salvation is a belief found across multiple **religions** that each person must be saved or redeemed from **sin** and its effects. Salvation may be found through personal effort, divine action, or a combination of the two depending on the **religion**.

## **saint**

A saint is a human who is considered to be particularly close to God or otherwise is holy. Saints are found across many **religions** and the term is considered to parallel that of the **Buddhist** bodhisattva, the **Sikh** guru, the **Hindu** rishi, the Jewish tzadik, and the **Islamic** wali. However, avoid treating these terms as interchangeable. In some **religions**, such as Roman Catholicism, there is a specific set of metrics for determining sainthood.

## **Sanskrit**

In addition to serving as the primary liturgical language of **Hinduism**, Sanskrit is one of the oldest Indo-European languages with substantial written documentation. Texts in Sanskrit are used in **Sikhism**, **Buddhism**, **Jainism**, and other **religions** and cultures in Southeast Asia.

## **Satanism**

Prior to 1966, few historical precedents of Satanism exist other than accusations and propaganda meant to **other women, people of color**, people with **disabilities**, members of non-majority religions, and people marginalized for other reasons. In 1966, Anton LaVey established the Church of Satan, and current chapters exist that identify with principles of religious freedom and opposition to **Christian** majorities. While the beliefs associated with Satanism can vary across chapters, they typically include shunning guilt, promoting learning, and following a code of ethics based on pragmatism. Avoid describing people as Satanists unless they specifically identify as such due to negative connotations associated with Satanism by members of other **religions**.

## **secularism**

Something that is secular has no **religious** or **spiritual** basis or connotation.

## **shari'a**

The term “shari'a” translates as “way” or “path.” It is the overall way of life of **Islam** and provides **Islam's** legal framework. However, shari'a is not a book of statutes or judicial precedent imposed by a government, and it's not a set of regulations adjudicated in court. Rather, it is a body of Qur'an-based guidance that points Muslims toward living an Islamic life, according to traditional, early interpretations. These early interpretations date

from 700 to 900 C.E., not long after the Prophet Muhammad died in 632 C.E. Shari'a can evolve with Islamic societies to address their needs today. The concept of following so-called "shari'a law" is used in **Islamophobic** propaganda. It's inaccurate and should be avoided.

### **Shi'a**

See **Islam**.

### **shrine**

A holy or sacred space dedicated to a specific entity is called a shrine. A shrine may be dedicated to a deity, saint, hero, martyr, ancestor, or other venerated figure.

### **Sikhism**

Sikhism originated in the Punjab region of the **Indian** subcontinent. Guru Nanak founded Sikhism around 1520. A person who follows Sikhism is described as a Sikh. Sikhs are sometimes confused with Muslims due to misconceptions about the turban Sikh men wear.

### **sin**

An act that goes against religious doctrine is considered a sin. The recognition and interpretation of sin varies greatly, and some **religions** have no concept of it. Others only allow sin to be recognized or addressed by **clergy**, and use a formal process to remove or absolve a person's sins. A person who has committed sins is a sinner. Never label someone as such unless they use this term for themselves.

### **solar calendar**

The solar calendar is the most common in the world, especially in the form of the **Gregorian calendar**. The solar calendar matches cycles of seasonal holidays, tourism, and agriculture more closely than lunar calendars. In the solar calendar, the dates indicate the position of Earth on its revolution around the sun or, equivalently, the apparent position of the sun moving on the celestial sphere. It is based on the seasonal year of about 365  $\frac{1}{4}$  days, the time it takes the Earth to revolve around the sun. The year is aligned with seasonal markers: the vernal (Spring) equinox, Summer solstice, autumnal (Fall) equinox, and the Winter solstice.

### **spirituality**

Spirituality is a way of being, or a search for purpose, direction, and oneness. It is a broad concept with many perspectives that is not necessarily tied to one **religion** in particular. In general, it includes

a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. People may describe a spiritual experience as transcendent, enlightenment, sacred, or interconnected.

### **Sunni**

See **Islam**.

### **synagogue**

A synagogue is the building where a Jewish congregation meets for religious worship and instruction. The building or place of assembly can also be referred to as a shul (from the Yiddish word for school), or as a **temple**.

### **temple**

A temple is a building devoted to the worship of a god or gods or other objects of religious reverence. In the Jewish religion, a place of worship can be referred to as a temple because of the connection to the religious buildings of the Jews in Jerusalem. The first Temple (957–586 B.C.E.) was built by Solomon and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The second (515 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.) was enlarged by Herod the Great from 20 B.C.E. and destroyed by the Romans during a Jewish revolt; all that remains is the Western Wall. Capitalize “Temple” when referring to the historic Jewish Temples. In **Hinduism** and **Buddhism**, places of worship are also known as temples. **Latter-day Saints** differentiate between temples (which are reserved for specific rituals) and church meeting houses, which are used for weekly worship services.

The Temple also refers to a group of buildings in Fleet Street in London, England that stand on land formerly occupied by the headquarters of the Knights Templar. Now home to one of the main legal districts in the U.K., writing about The Temple in London requires additional context to avoid confusing readers.

### **voodoo**

Voodoo is an umbrella term used to refer to a number of African and **African American** religions, often incorrectly. In the U.S., Louisiana Voodoo (also known as New Orleans Voodoo) is one of the best known denominations of Voodoo. Louisiana Voodoo comprises a set of spiritual folkways drawn from the traditions of the African **Diaspora** as well as from Roman Catholicism. Louisiana Voodoo is often confused with Haitian Vodou and



Deep Southern Hoodoo. Other denominations of Voodoo include Brazilian Vodum, West African Vodun, and Dominican Vodú. Other African Diasporic religions are often mis-characterized as Voodoo, but are distinct (e.g., Santería, Umbanda, Obeah, and Palo). Be wary of reinforcing cultural appropriation when writing about Voodoo concepts without contextualizing them, and do not reinforce racist stereotypes about practitioners of Voodoo.

### **witchcraft**

Contemporary witchcraft includes a variety of **religions** and practices focused on shared rituals and attunement with natural forces. Members of **Pagan** and **Neo-Pagan** religions, including Wicca, may refer to themselves as witches. Avoid using the term to describe people who don't self-identify as such — while pop culture and modern **feminism** have done a great deal to reclaim the term “witch,” it still can carry many negative connotations. Furthermore, the term “witch” is often used as a substitute for more profane insults typically targeted towards **women**. Avoid reinforcing such negative connotations.

Witchcraft's historical context is complex. Many religions, including **Christianity**, have used accusations of witchcraft (along with accusations of **Satanism**) to **other women** in particular. Because witchcraft was illegal and required minimal proof to obtain a conviction, numerous people were executed under charges of witchcraft. Terms like “witch hunt,” which is used to describe a search for (and removal of) people holding unorthodox perspectives, grew out of this time and should be used with caution.

### **Yom Kippur**

Pronounced *jəm kíp̩ər*, Yom Kippur is the Jewish Day of Repentance (Atonement). It takes place in September or October of the **Gregorian calendar**. Yom Kippur is observed from sunset on the eve of the holy day until three stars appear in the sky at the end of the day in prayer. The practice is to **abstain** from food, drink, work, sexual relations, anointing (bathing, perfumes), and wearing leather (luxuries) as a way to repent for misdeeds of the past year.



# OBSERVANCES

## QUICK DATE REFERENCE

This calendar includes religious, governmental, and secular holidays that should be considered when planning content and events. It can also be used to check the Gregorian calendar dates of observances from non-Gregorian calendars in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Please note that all Bahá'í, Islamic, Jewish, and Neo-Pagan observances begin at sundown the preceding evening of the date listed.

Holiday	2017	2018	2019
New Year's Day Gregorian	January 1	January 1	January 1
Temple Day Buddhist	January 1	January 1	January 1
Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Birthday Sikh	January 5	January 5	January 13
Epiphany Western Christian	January 6	January 6	January 6
Christmas Armenian Orthodox Christian	January 6	January 6	January 6
Christmas Eastern Christian and Rastafarian	January 7	January 7	January 7
National Human Trafficking Awareness Day U.S.	January 11	January 11	January 11
New Year's Day Mahayana Buddhist	January 12 to 15	January 2 to 4	January 21 to 23
Makar Sankranti Hindu	January 14	January 14	January 15
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday U.S.	January 16	January 16	January 16

Anniversary of the Overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii Hawaiian	January 17	January 17	January 17
Epiphany Eastern Christian	January 19	January 19	January 19
UN Holocaust Memorial Day Global	January 27	January 27	January 27
Lunar New Year Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese	January 28	February 16	February 5
Martyrs Day Indian	January 30	January 30	January 30
Season for Nonviolence Global	January 30 to April 4	January 30 to April 4	January 30 to April 4
Black History Month U.S.	February	February	February
National Freedom Day U.S.	February 1	February 1	February 1
World Interfaith Harmony Week Global	February 1 to 7	To be announced	To be announced
World Cancer Day Global	February 4	February 4	February 4
International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation Global	February 6	February 6	February 6
Tu B'Shvat Jewish	February 11	January 31	January 21
International Purple Hijab Day Islamic	February 11	February 10	February 9
World Day of the Sick Roman Catholic	February 11	February 11	February 11

Magha Puja Buddhist	February 11	March 1	March 21
National Freedom to Marry Day U.S.	February 12	February 12	February 12
Red Hand Day (International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers) Global	February 12	February 12	February 12
Valentine's Day North American, European, and Asian	February 14	February 14	February 14
Singles Awareness Day U.S.	February 14	February 14	February 14
Susan B. Anthony Day U.S.	February 15	February 15	February 15
Nirvana Day (Painirvana Day) Buddhist	February 15	February 15	February 15
Louis Riel Day Canadian	February 20	February 19	February 18
International Mother Language Day Global	February 21	February 21	February 21
Anniversary of Oceti Sakowin's Clearance Standing Rock Reservation	Not applicable	February 23	February 23
Maha Shivaratri Hindu	February 24	February 13	March 4
Ayyám-i-Há Bahá'í	February 25 to February 28	February 25 to March 1	February 26 to March 1

Beginning of Great Lent Eastern Christian	February 27	February 19	March 11
Rare Disease Day Global	February 28	February 28	February 28
Leap Day Gregorian	—	—	—
National Women's History Month U.S.	March	March	March
Ash Wednesday Western Christian	March 1	February 14	March 6
Nineteen-Day Fast Bahá'í	March 1 to 19	March 1 to 20	March 1 to 20
International Women's Day Global	March 8	March 8	March 8
Harriet Tubman Day U.S.	March 10	March 10	March 10
Tibetan Uprising Day Tibetan	March 10	March 10	March 10
Purim Jewish	March 12	March 1	March 21
Hola Mohalla Sikh	March 13	March 2	March 22
Holi Hindu	March 13	March 2	March 21
Anniversary of the Election of Pope Francis Roman Catholic	March 13	March 13	March 13
Pi Day Global	March 14	March 14	March 14
St. Patrick's Day Irish, U.S.	March 17	March 17	March 17
International Day of Happiness Global	March 20	March 20	March 20

March Equinox Global	March 20	March 20	March 20
Naw-rúz Bahá'í	March 20	March 21	March 21
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Global	March 21	March 21	March 21
World Tuberculosis Day Global	March 24	March 24	March 24
Prince Kūhiō Day Hawaiian	March 26	March 26	March 26
Land Day Palestinian	March 30	March 30	March 30
International Transgender Day of Visibility Global	March 31	March 31	March 31
Cesar Chavez's Birthday U.S.	March 31	March 31	March 31
Genocide Awareness Month Global	April	April	April
April Fools' Day U.S.	April 1	April 1	April 1
Qingming Festival Chinese	April 4	April 5	April 5
Rama Navami Hindu	April 5	March 25	April 14
Anniversary of the Foundation of the Church of Latter- day Saints L.D.S.	April 6	April 6	April 6
World Health Day Global	April 7	April 7	April 7

Palm Sunday Western Christian	April 9	March 25	April 14
Palm Sunday Eastern Christian	April 9	April 1	April 21
New Year's Day Theravada Buddhist	April 11 to 14	April 30 to May 2	April 19 to 21
First Passover Seder Jewish	April 10	March 30	April 19
Pesach (Passover) Jewish	April 11 to 18	March 31 to April 7	April 20 to 27
Yuri's Night (International Day of Human Space Flight)	April 12	April 12	April 12
Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) Western Christian	April 13	March 29	April 18
Holy Thursday Eastern Christian	April 13	April 5	April 25
Good Friday (Holy Friday) Western Christian	April 14	March 30	April 19
Good Friday (Holy Friday) Eastern Christian	April 14	April 6	April 26
Vaisakhi Sikh	April 13	April 13	April 13
Easter Western Christian	April 16	April 1	April 21
Pascha Eastern Christian	April 16	April 8	April 28
LGBT Students Day of Silence U.S.	April 21	April 27	TBA
Festival of Ridván Bahá'í	April 20 to May 1	April 21 to May 2	April 21 to May 2
Groundation Day Rastafarian	April 21	April 21	April 21



Earth Day Global	April 22	April 22	April 22
Yom Hashoah Jewish	April 24	April 12	May 2
Armenian Martyrs Day (Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day) Armenian	April 24	April 24	April 24
World Immunization Week Global	April 24 to 30	April 23 to 29	April 22 to April 28
World Malaria Day Global	April 25	April 25	April 25
DNA Day U.S.	April 25	April 25	April 25
Asian Pacific American Heritage Month U.S.	May	May	May
Jewish American Heritage Month U.S.	May	May	May
International Worker's Day (May Day) Global	May 1	May 1	May 1
Beltane Neo-Pagan	May 1	May 1	May 1
World Press Freedom Day Global	May 3	May 3	May 3
Cinco de Mayo Mexican, U.S. (not to be confused with Independence Day in Mexico)	May 5	May 5	May 5
Victory in Europe Day (V-E Day) U.S.	May 8	May 8	May 8

Buddha Day (Vesak) Buddhist	May 10	May 21	May 19
Lag B'Omer Jewish	May 14	May 3	May 23
Mother's Day U.S.	May 14	May 13	May 12
World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development Global	May 21	May 21	May 21
Harvey Milk Day U.S.	May 22	May 22	May 22
Victoria Day Canadian	May 22	May 21	May 20
Declaration of the Báb Bahá'í	May 23	May 24	May 24
Ascension Day (Feast of the Ascension) Western Christian	May 25	May 10	May 30
Ascension Day (Feast of the Ascension) Eastern Christian	May 25	May 17	June 6
Ramadan Islamic	May 27 to June 24	May 16 to June 14	May 6 to June 3
Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh Bahá'í	May 28	May 29	May 29
Memorial Day U.S.	May 29	May 28	May 27
Duanwu Festival (Dragon Boat Festival) Chinese	May 30	June 18	June 7
Shavuot Jewish	May 31 to June 1	May 20 to 21	June 9 to 10

LGBT Pride Month U.S.	June	June	June
International Sex Workers Day Global	June 2	June 2	June 2
Pentecost (Whitsunday) Western Christian	June 4	May 20	June 9
Pentecost Eastern Christian	June 4	May 27	June 16
Kamehameha Day Hawaiian	June 11	June 11	June 11
Birthday of Anne Frank Global	June 12	June 12	June 12
Loving Day U.S.	June 12	June 12	June 12
World Blood Donor Day Global	June 14	June 14	June 14
Father's Day U.S.	June 18	June 17	June 16
Autistic Pride Day Global	June 18	June 18	June 18
Juneteenth U.S.	June 19	June 19	June 19
World Refugee Day Global	June 20	June 20	June 20
June Solstice Global	June 21	June 21	June 21
World Humanist Day Global	June 21	June 21	June 21
Laila al-Qadr Islamic	June 22	June 11	May 31
Eid al-Fitr Islamic	June 25	June 15	June 4

Galactic Tick Day Global	—	June 26	—
Anniversary of Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage U.S.	June 26	June 26	June 26
Helen Keller Day U.S.	June 27	June 27	June 27
Anniversary of the Stonewall Riot U.S.	June 28	June 28	June 28
Canada Day Canadian	July 1	July 1	July 1
Independence Day U.S.	July 4	July 4	July 4
Aslha Puja Theravada Buddhist	July 8	July 27	July 16
Martyrdom of the Báb Bahá'í	July 9	July 10	July 10
Ethiopian Constitution Day Rastafarian	July 16	July 16	July 16
Pi Approximation Day Global	July 22	July 22	July 22
Birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie Rastafarian	July 23	July 23	July 23
Pioneer Day L.D.S	July 24	July 24	July 24
Americans with Disabilities Act Day U.S.	July 26	July 26	July 26
World Hepatitis Day Global	July 28	July 28	July 28
Raksha Bandhan Hindu	August 7	August 26	August 15

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples Global	August 9	August 9	August 9
International Youth Day Global	August 12	August 12	August 12
Krishna Janmashtami (Jayanti) Hindu	August 14	September 2	August 24
Marcus Garvey's Birthday Rastafarian	August 17	August 17	August 17
International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition Global	August 23	August 23	August 23
Ganesh Chaturthi Hindu	August 25	September 13	September 2
Women's Equality Day U.S.	August 26	August 26	August 26
Qixi Festival Chinese	August 28	August 17	August 7
Eid al-Adha Islamic	September 2	August 22	August 12
Victory Over Japan Day (V-J Day) U.S.	September 2	September 2	September 2
Labor Day U.S.	September 4	September 3	September 2
Ghost Festival Chinese	September 5	August 25	August 15
International Day of Charity Global	September 5	September 5	September 5

International Literacy Day Global	September 8	September 8	September 8
Patriot Day U.S.	September 11	September 11	September 11
Ethiopian New Year's Day Rastafarian	September 11	September 11	September 11
Day of the Programmer Global	September 13	September 13	September 13
National Hispanic Heritage Month U.S.	September 15 to October 15	September 15 to October 15	September 15 to October 15
Independence Day Mexican	September 16	September 16	September 16
Constitution and Citizenship Day U.S.	September 17	September 17	September 17
Rosh Hashanah Jewish	September 21 to 22	September 10 to 11	September 30 to October 1
Navaratri Hindu	September 21 to 29	October 9 to October 17	September 29 to October 8
International Day of Peace Global	September 21	September 21	September 21
September Equinox Global	September 22	September 23	September 23
New Year (Muharram) Islamic	September 22	September 12	September 1
Bisexual Visibility Day U.S.	September 23	September 23	September 23
Durga Purja Hindu	September 27 to 30	October 15 to 19	October 4 to 8
Ashura Islamic	September 30	September 21	September 10

Yom Kippur Jewish	September 30	September 19	October 9
LGBT History Month U.S.	October	October	October
National Disability Employment Awareness Month U.S.	October	October	October
Mid-Autumn Festival Chinese	October 4	September 24	September 13
Sukkot Jewish	October 5 to 11	September 24 to 25	October 14 to 15
Indigenous People's Day U.S.	October 9	October 8	October 14
Thanksgiving Canadian	October 9	October 8	October 14
World Mental Health Day Global	October 10	October 10	October 10
Ada Lovelace Day U.K.	October 10	October 9	October 8
National Coming Out Day U.S.	October 11	October 11	October 11
Shemini Atzeret Jewish	October 12	October 1	October 21
Simchat Torah Jewish	October 13	October 2	October 22
World Standards Day Global	October 14	October 14	October 14
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty Global	October 17	October 17	October 17
Diwali Hindu	October 19	November 7	October 27

Bandi-Chhor Diwas Sikh	October 19	November 7	November 23
Birth of the Báb Bahá'í	October 21	November 9	October 29
Gur-Gaddi Guru Granth Sahib Sikh	October 20	October 20	October 20
World Osteoporosis Day Global	October 20	October 20	October 20
Asexual Awareness Week U.S.	October 22 to 28	TBA	TBA
Birth of Bahá'u'lláh Bahá'í	October 22	November 10	October 30
National Day Against Police Brutality U.S.	October 22	October 22	October 22
United Nations Day Global	October 24	October 24	October 24
Intersex Awareness Day Global	October 26	October 26	October 26
Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions Former Soviet republics	October 30	October 30	October 30
Halloween U.S.	October 31	October 31	October 31
Reformation Day Protestant	October 31 500th anniversary	October 31	October 31
Day of the Dead Mexican	October 31 to November 2	October 31 to November 2	October 31 to November 2



National American Indian Heritage Month U.S.	November	November	November
All Saints' Day Western Christian	November 1	November 1	November 1
Samhain Neo-Pagan	November 1	November 1	November 1
All Souls' Day Christian	November 2	November 2	November 2
Crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie Rastafarian	November 2	November 2	November 2
International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists Global	November 2	November 2	November 2
Intersex Day of Remembrance Global	November 8	November 8	November 8
Kristallnacht Jewish	November 9	November 9	November 9
Veterans' Day U.S.	November 11	November 11	November 11
World Diabetes Day Global	November 14	November 14	November 14
International Day for Tolerance Global	November 16	November 16	November 16
National Survivors of Suicide Day U.S.	November 18	November 17	November 23
Transgender Day of Remembrance Global	November 20	November 20	November 20
Thanksgiving Day U.S.	November 23	November 22	November 28

National Day of Mourning U.S.	November 23	November 22	November 28
Unthanksgiving Day (Indigenous Peoples Sunrise Ceremony) U.S.	November 23	November 22	November 28
Day of the Covenant Bahá'í	November 25	November 26	November 26
Anniversary of Rosa Parks's Arrest U.S.	December 1	December 1	December 1
World AIDS Day Global	December 1	December 1	December 1
Mawlid al-Nabi Sunni Islamic	December 1	November 21	November 10
International Day of Persons with Disabilities Global	December 3	December 3	December 3
Advent Western Christian	December 3 to 24	December 3 to 24	December 3 to 24
Mawlid Al-Nabi Shi'a Islamic	December 6	November 26	November 15
Bodhi Day Buddhist	December 8	December 8	December 8
Human Rights Day Global	December 10	December 10	December 10
Our Lady of Guadalupe Mexican, Christian	December 12	December 12	December 12
Hanukkah Jewish	December 13 to 20	December 3 to 10	December 23 to 30
Bill of Rights Day U.S.	December 15	December 15	December 15
December Solstice Global	December 21	December 21	December 22
Yule Neo-Pagan	December 21	December 21	December 22

Festivus U.S.	December 23	December 23	December 23
Christmas Western Christian	December 25	December 25	December 25
Kwanzaa U.S.	December 26 to January 1	December 26 to January 1	December 26 to January 1
Wounded Knee Day U.S.	December 29	December 29	December 29



# GUIDANCE ON GATHERING INFORMATION

When gathering and displaying data, you need to consider the information you collect with care. A well-designed form will avoid hurting people and create goodwill in many of your users. A poorly designed form will perpetuate discrimination and actively cause harm. You may also need to consider the legal constraints on collecting and storing personally identifiable information, medical details, or financial information in different countries. These constraints can change on short notice, so you'll need to research constraints for the different countries you expect users to come from, as well as stay up to date on those details.

You also need to consider how the information you collect may be used: while a single point of data may be inconsequential on its own, data science is based on finding and correlating data across multiple sources, for purposes far beyond why that information was initially collected.

Classes of data you should consider carefully before collecting include

- Addresses
- Family History
- Income
- Medical History
- Race
- Relatives

If something would be damaging to leak, try your best not to collect it because no data is perfectly safe. If you do choose to collect such details, be sure to do so in a way that respects your users and keeps their information secure.

## Names

Depending on your needs, you may be considering users' names as a unique identifier. However, names are not unique. In fact, names are tricky in many different ways.

### **DOES YOUR APPLICATION NEED A NAME FROM YOUR USER IN ORDER TO MEET YOUR USER'S NEEDS?**

It probably does, but don't default to requiring a name.

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION ALLOW YOUR USERS TO INDICATE WHICH PART OF THEIR NAME THEY WOULD LIKE YOUR APP TO ADDRESS THEM BY?**

Allowing this option will better serve not only trans users but international users and the many people that prefer to use a nickname.

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION ALLOW YOUR USERS TO UPDATE THEIR NAME?**

When your user updates their name, does it populate through all data caches?

**IF YOU USE A THIRD-PARTY SIGN-IN SYSTEM TO POPULATE A USER'S NAME, DOES YOUR APPLICATION PERIODICALLY CHECK TO MAKE SURE YOUR DATA IS UP-TO-DATE?**

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION REQUIRE YOUR USERS TO PROVIDE A LEGAL OR "REAL" NAME?**

The number of applications where requiring a legal name makes sense is vanishingly small. Yours probably isn't one of them. If your application requires a legal name, do not refer to it as a "real" name. If your application requires a legal name, clarify which document you need data from. For example, a patient intake form most likely needs the name on the patient's insurance card, whereas an online driver's license renewal form needs the name on the license.

**IF YOUR APPLICATION REQUIRES A LEGAL NAME, DO YOU ALSO ALLOW YOUR USERS TO PROVIDE A "PREFERRED NAME?"**

Allowing this option will better serve not only trans users, but international users and the many people that prefer to use a nickname.

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION ALLOW USERS TO WRITE THEIR NAMES CORRECTLY?**

Does your application allow users to write their name in characters other than those in the Latin alphabet? Does your application allow users to properly capitalize their name, including for users whose names are all in lowercase letters?

## **DOES YOUR FORM VERIFICATION SYSTEM ACCIDENTALLY ELIMINATE ANYONE’S NAME?**

Eliminating words that match a profanity dictionary or that contain the word “null” will make your application unusable for a surprising number of people.

## **DOES YOUR FORM OFFER ENOUGH SPACE FOR A USER TO ENTER THEIR COMPLETE NAME?**

The current world record for a name is 898 letters and 161 words long.

## **DOES YOUR APPLICATION REQUIRE USING A FAMILY NAME OR SURNAME THAT IS RECOGNIZABLY TIED TO OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS?**

Not only are surnames not universal, but many people have names that do not connect them to a larger family.

## **DOES YOUR FORM ALLOW FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT NAMES?**

Whether you’re handling a person unable to provide a name or a child who has not yet been assigned a name, you can’t assume that a person automatically uses a name.

## **DOES YOUR APPLICATION ALLOW FOR PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE NAMES, ESPECIALLY IN CONNECTED RECORDS?**

Being able to differentiate between George Bush (the 41st President of the U.S.) and George Bush (the 43rd President of the U.S.) is important.

## **Gender**

There’s a good chance you don’t need to gather gender information about your users. Don’t default to asking for it, and certainly don’t default to requiring it! If you’re going to ask for it, make sure to ask for the information you actually need. Do you need to know which pronouns to use? How to address your user formally? For insurance purposes? Each of these questions will give you different answers.

Start with these guidelines:

- Let your users opt out of providing gender information.
- Provide text boxes to your users so they can volunteer whatever information they prefer to give you about their gender.

- Don't reinforce the binary or the ternary. Radio button options of Male / Female or Female / Male / Other are othering to your nonbinary users.

You should also consider these questions if you do need to collect information about gender:

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN GENDERS IN THE INFORMATION IT PRESENTS?**

Is that information based on social constructions of gender, medical discussions of gender, or something else? Provide that context to your users.

**DO YOU HAVE A WAY TO CHANGE A USER'S GENDER OR REMOVE GENDER INFORMATION ENTIRELY?**

When your user updates their gender, does it populate through all data caches?

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION HAVE A WAY TO SET A USER'S PRONOUNS RATHER THAN ATTEMPTING TO INFER THEM FROM OTHER INFORMATION?**

Can a user update their pronouns without calling customer support?

## Sexuality

While information about sexuality in general may be best avoided in the average application, certain statuses, such as marriage, associated with sexuality have long-term legal and financial implications.

Consider these questions when collecting information about sexuality, marriage, and related topics.

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION NEED INFORMATION ABOUT A PERSON'S SEXUALITY OR MARITAL STATUS?**

Unless you're helping with finances or matching folks for dates, it may not.

**DOES YOUR APPLICATION PROVIDE A WAY TO UPDATE MARITAL STATUS?**

If so, are you using legal marital status or religious marital status? If legal, stick to exactly the terms used in the legal context you're



working within. For instance, the I.R.S. differentiates between “unmarried,” “married filing jointly,” and “married filing separately,” along with a few nuances about nonresident spouses and heads of household.

### **DOES YOUR APPLICATION OFFER USERS A WAY TO SET THE TERMS USED FOR THEIR PARTNER OR SPOUSE?**

### **DOES YOUR APPLICATION LIMIT THE NUMBER OF PARTNERS OR RELATIONSHIPS A USER CAN LIST?**

Not only do many cultures provide for non-monogamous relationships either formally or informally, but a person can have multiple partners in monogamous relationships (e.g., a co-parent from a previous relationship).

### **DOES YOUR FORM PROVIDE A SPACE FOR USERS TO DESCRIBE THEIR SEXUAL IDENTITIES, WITHOUT RESTRICTING THEM TO EITHER / OR SWITCHES OR RADIO BUTTONS?**

You may need information about sexual identity if you're working on a dating app, but consider ways to match people that don't rely on either/or options.

## **Families**

Our definitions of family are tied to our identities. Family structures can vary dramatically. Consider these questions when looking at family structure:

### **DOES YOUR APPLICATION ASSUME THAT A FAMILY HAS A SPECIFIC NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN IT?**

Many account sharing options limit the account to five family members, but that doesn't work for families with two parents and more than three kids, intergenerational families of more than five people, or any other family structure with more than five people.

### **DOES YOUR APPLICATION ASSUME THAT A PERSON IS TIED TO A SINGLE FAMILY PERMANENTLY OR INDEFINITELY?**

Marriage, adoption, and other life events can dramatically change who is part of a family.

### **DOES YOUR APPLICATION DEFINE A HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD OR A FAMILY MANAGER ROLE?**

If so, don't assume any particular characteristic goes with that role. Assuming that the head of household is male is sexist, but

other assumptions are equally dangerous. Assuming that a head of household must be 18 can limit the services accessed by emancipated minors, people married before the age of 18, and families relying on individual family members as translators.

### **DOES YOUR FORM ASSUME A PERSON CAN ONLY HAVE TWO PARENTS?**

While there may be reason to differentiate between biological parentage, legal guardianship, parental marriage status, and financial support, just asking someone to list up to two parents is rarely sufficient. Depending on the definition, some people also have zero or one parents.

### **DOES YOUR APPLICATION ASSUME A PERSON CAN ONLY BELONG TO ONE FAMILY AT A TIME?**

Children of divorced parents routinely find themselves in complicated situations because they aren't able to provide information about multiple families.

## **Dates and Times**

Because different countries, cultures, and religions all use different calendars, be wary of how your applications handle dates and times. While time zones represent their own unique problems, there are more considerations than just what time an event may happen at.

### **WHEN WILL YOUR USERS BE ONLINE? DO THEY GO OFFLINE FOR THE ENTIRETY OF THE SABBATH?**

### **WILL USERS BE ABLE TO ADD DATES TO YOUR APPLICATION?**

If so, are users able to add dates not based on the Gregorian calendar? Don't assume that tools already exist for implementing other calendars, though: many standard libraries are strictly based on the Gregorian calendar.

### **HOW DOES YOUR APPLICATION HANDLE DATES TIED TO LUNAR, LUNISOLAR, AND NON-GREGORIAN SOLAR CALENDARS, LIKE EASTER?**

### **WHEN DOES A NEW DAY BEGIN ON YOUR CALENDAR?**

Given that many calendars start new days at sundown, rather than sunrise or midnight, make sure that events are scheduled properly for your users.

**DO YOU HAVE WAYS TO UPDATE YOUR APPLICATION FOR INTERCALATION DATES, INCLUDING THE INSERTION OF SECONDS, DAYS, MONTHS, AND OTHER PERIODS OF TIME?**

Even established calendars, such as the Bahá'í calendar, may be dramatically changed with relatively short notice.

**WHEN REFERENCING YEARS, DO YOU NOTE THEIR CALENDAR?**

Especially for historical dates, doing so is necessary, even for years in the Gregorian calendar. Make sure to note Gregorian dates as B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) or C.E. (Common Era), rather than B.C. or A.D.

**DO YOU TIE CERTAIN HOLIDAYS TO MONTHS OR SEASONS?**

For holidays on lunar and lunisolar calendars, dates on the Gregorian calendar can dramatically fluctuate.



# PEOPLE, ORGANIZATIONS, AND TECHNOLOGIES

## QUICK STYLE REFERENCE

This reference covers spelling, capitalization, and style for people, organizations, and other proper nouns routinely used in discussing the technology industry.

Ada	Cook, Tim
AGPL	Copyfree
Alphabet	Cray, Seymour
Amazon	Creative Commons
Android	CSS
Apache License	Debian
Apple	Dorsey, Jack
Assembly	eBay
Ballmer, Steve	Ellison, Larry
BarCamp	Erlang
BASIC	Expedia
Bezos, Jeff	Facebook
BSD	Fedora
C	Fortran
Cerf, Vint	free software
Cisco Systems	Free Software Foundation
COBOL	Gates, Bill
command line	GitHub

Go	Microsoft
Google	MIT license
Owned by Alphabet.	Node.js
GPL	O'Reilly Media
Hamilton, Margaret	O'Reilly, Tim
Haskell	Objective-C
Hopper, Rear Admiral Grace	OCaml
HP	Omidyar, Pierre
HTML	open source
IBM	Open Source Bridge
Intel	Oracle
iOS	OSCON
Java	Page, Larry
JavaScript	Perl
Jobs, Steve	PHP
Lerner, Sandra	programming language
LinkedIn	Prolog
Linux	Python
Lisp	Ritchie, Dennis
Lovelace, Ada	Rometty, Virginia
Markdown	Ruby
MATLAB	Rust
Mayer, Marissa	Sandberg, Sheryl

SanDisk

Salesforce

Silicon Valley

Smalltalk

SQL

Stallman, Richard

Swift

Symantec

Thompson, Ken

Turing, Alan

Unix

Visual Basic

WebMD

Whitman, Meg

wiki

Wikimedia Foundation

Wikipedia  
Operated by the Wikimedia  
Foundation.

Windows

WordPress

XEROX





## TERMS TO AVOID

These words and phrases should be considered off-limits. It is not exhaustive. There are some communities that may be interested in reclaiming terms on this list, but unless you are a member of one of those communities, avoid these terms. If a person self-identifies using one of these terms, you can typically use that term in a quote.

accuser	catcall
addict	Caucasian (as a broad racial category)
alcoholic	challenged (in reference to disability)
alien (in reference to immigration status)	childish
amputee	classy
anchor baby	clean (in reference to medical status)
ancient (in reference to age)	colorblind
antiquated (in reference to age)	control freak
afflicted by (in reference to disability)	cougar (in reference to sexuality)
be a man	courageous (in reference to disability)
birth defect	crazy
blacklist	cripple
booth babe	culture fit
boys will be boys	cure
brain-damaged	deaf and dumb
bum	deaf-mute
career suicide	

deformed	gender bender
demented	Gender Identity Disorder
detox	gimp
dirty (in reference to medical status)	girl (when referring to an adult woman)
Down's person	girlfriend test
dramatic (in reference to medical treatment)	grammar Nazi
dumb	grandfather clause
dyke	green card holder
eco-nazi	guys (when meant to be gender neutral)
epileptic	gypped
Eskimo	gypsy
fag	half-blood
female connector	half-breed
feminazi	half-caste
foreigner	handicapped
freak	handicapped parking
full-blood	handicapped restrooms
full-blown AIDS	has fits
gay divorce	he-she
gay marriage	healthy (especially outside of a medical context)
geezer	hearing-impaired

hermaphrodite	journey (in reference to gender identity)
homo	just shoot me
hope (in reference to medical treatment)	kiddy porn
idiot	lame
illegal (when referring to a person)	legal alien
illegal alien	legal citizen
illegal immigrant	legal resident
immature	lesbian until graduation or LUG
impaired	less fortunate
Indian (when referring to a person not from India)	lifestyle choice
infertile	loony
infirm	loony bin
inner city	lower the bar
insane	mad (in reference to mental illness)
inspirational (in reference to disability)	male connector
invalid	man (as a synonym for work)
it (in reference to a person)	man hours
Jew down	man power
Jewish Christmas	man up
john	maniac
	mankind
	marijuana

master	old man
mental asylum	open the kimono
mentally handicapped	Oriental
Mestizo	over the hill
minorities	part-Indian
miracle (when referring to a medical treatment)	part-native
mixed blood	peanut gallery
mixed race	porn
mom test	post-operative or post-op
mongoloid	post-racial
moron	pre-operative or pre-op
mulatto	pro-choice
Muslim Christmas	pro-life
mutt	prostitute
needy or in need	psycho
Negro	red (in reference to race)
non-straight	redskin
nut job	regrets (in reference to sexual or gendered violence)
nuts	rehab
nutso	resident alien
nutter	retarded
old lady	

rock star (in reference to programming ability)

schizo

schizophrenic

second world

seeing eye dog

senile

sex change

shari'a law

shemale or she-male

simple

skank

slave

slow

slut

so easy your mom could do it

social justice warrior

spaz

special

speech-impaired

squaw

suffers from (in reference to disability)

talk me off the ledge

third world

those people

throw someone under the bus

thug

trannie or tranny

transient (in reference to housing status)

transvestite

tree hugger

turn a blind eye

unborn baby

unborn child

unicorn

unskilled labor

unwed mother

vegetable (when referring to a person)

victim of (in reference to disability)

walk of shame

weak-minded

weirdo

whackjob

wheelchair-bound

whitelist

whore

witch doctor

work ethic

These words are more nuanced: there are certain situations in which they can be used correctly, but you probably need special training or subject matter expertise to use them.

abnormal	samurai
chastity	shaman
cult	spirit animal
death march	totem
folklore	two spirit
ghetto	virgin
guru	wheeler
hacker	witch
little person	
Lolita	
medicine healer	
meritocracy	
magic	
myth	
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is ultimately the result of hundreds of conversations, read-overs, Kickstarter pledges, and other support. Thank you for all your help. We'd also like to acknowledge the creators of style guides that informed our process: we read dozens of style guides in preparation for this project and appreciate the hard work work of the organizations and individuals who paved our way.

We'd like to particularly acknowledge the help of the wonderful people below.

Amelia Abreu  
Kronda Adair  
Elea Chang  
Courtney Eckhardt  
Paul Evans  
Shelby, Lane, and Zachary Evans  
Michelle Ferrell  
Rachel Giuliani  
Lucas Grzybowski  
Sumana Harihareswara  
Sydette Harry  
Michael Hernandez  
Paige Hendrix Buckner  
Kojo Idrissa  
Karen and Al (z"l) Kaplan  
Elisa Kaplan Miller  
Kamal Marhubi  
Christie Koehler

Asher Kolieboi  
Katie Lane  
Hawnuh Lee  
Melissa Lewis  
Jessi Macklin  
Arthur Magida  
Erin McKean  
Mandy Moore  
T. Michael Rock  
Sarah Rockford  
Gabriela Rodríguez Berón  
Sam Scott  
Rachel Shadoan  
Sarah Sharp  
Kelli Shewmaker  
Megan Waterhouse  
Aria Zeo

