

Cornell University Press Inclusive Editorial Style Guide

Inclusive Content Statement

Cornell University is committed to building a more diverse and inclusive environment, where individuals from diverse backgrounds and life experiences can both contribute and thrive. Cornell University Press (CUP) is committed to increasing diversity in publishing at Cornell and beyond. This commitment extends to the staff we hire, the authors we publish, the peer reviewers we engage, and the language our authors use. This style guide is not meant to be an exhaustive resource of every issue to consider but rather a starting point from which to approach an analysis of your work's sensitivity toward people of all abilities, ages, ethnicities, cultures, races, genders, and sexual orientations.

In general, be considerate of your subject's preferences, be aware of context, and keep in mind that inclusivity in language is an evolving subject.

Chicago 5.254: Bias and the editor's responsibility: "A careful editor points out to authors any biased terms or approaches in the work (knowing, of course, that the bias may have been unintentional), suggests alternatives, and ensures that any biased language that is retained is retained by choice."

Ability/Disability

See National Center on Disability and Journalism for information on specific disabilities. But prioritize self-advocacy organizations for specific groups when such are available.

Disability Language Style Guide: <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

Basic Guidelines:

- Refer to a disability only when it's relevant to the story being told or the topic being discussed.
- Consider carefully whether the person or people you're writing about consider their condition(s) to be a disability.
- When deciding whether to use people-first language or identity-first language, consider the preferences of the community involved as well as what is indicated by the source.
- When possible, ask the source how they would like to be described. If the source is not available or unable, ask a relevant organization that represents people with disabilities or, if necessary, a trusted family member. Keep in mind, however, that "trusted family member" can be a fraught issue in the disability rights community.
- Avoid made-up words like "diversability" and "handicapable" unless using them in direct quotes or to refer to a movement or organization. Treat the word "difference" when used as a synonym for "disability" with caution.

- The word “retarded” and its variants are hate speech on par with racial slurs and should be treated in the same manner.
- Language around wheelchairs and other mobility aids should be treated with neutral or empowering language. Avoid, for example, “wheelchair bound” or “confined to a wheelchair.”

While CUP uses *Chicago* Style, AP Style offers more resources for writing about people with disabilities at this time. For a deeper dive into equitable and inclusive writing, [browse their stylebook](#), accessible via Cornell Library.

Ethnic and Racial Designations and Special Considerations

Some races and ethnicities have multiple terms associated with them. When possible, ask for a person’s preference.

In general, use ethnic and racial designations as adjectives rather than nouns (e.g., instead of “Blacks / Chinese / whites / etc.,” use “Black people / Black Americans / Chinese women / white voters / etc.”)

African American, Italian American, Chinese American (no hyphen): see *Chicago* 8.39. Note that some people who have generations of American ancestors prefer the term *Black* to *African American*. Some scholars believe it is also more inclusive of all Black people.

Black (uppercase) / white (lowercase): Per *Chicago* 8.38, *Black* is increasingly capitalized when referring to racial or ethnic identity. *Chicago* says that “as a matter of editorial consistency, similar terms such as *White* may also be capitalized when used in this sense. Usage varies according to context, however, and individual preferences should be respected.”

CUP has expressed a preference for lowercasing *white*, however, because doing so avoids risking associations with hate groups. See also this article by *Columbia Journalism Review*: <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php>.

Slavery: When discussing slavery, always use “enslaved people” instead of “slaves.”

For more about terms relating to Black culture:
[National Association of Black Journalists](#)

Indigenous peoples: Be aware of the preferred terms of different groups of Indigenous peoples. For example, per *Chicago* 8.38, many among those who trace their roots to the Aboriginal peoples of the Americas prefer *American Indians* to *Native Americans*, and in certain historical works *Indians* may be more appropriate. Canadians often speak of *First Peoples* (and of *First Nations*) when not referring to specific groups by name.

For more about terms relating to Native Americans:
<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/faq/did-you-know>

Latino/a (for a male/female) or Latinx (for a nonbinary or otherwise gender-nonconforming person) refers to someone of Latin American origin. **Latinx** may also be used to refer to Latino/a people in general. **Hispanic** refers to someone of Spanish-speaking origin. **Spanish** refers to someone from Spain.

Asian American refers to someone of Asian origin. This is a diverse population with ancestral origins in South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.

For more about terms relating to Asian culture:

<https://www.aaia.org/2020/11/30/guide-to-covering-asian-pacific-america/>

Antisemitism (not *anti-Semitism* as in *Merriam-Webster's*): see

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/antisemitism/spelling-antisemitism>.

The “n” word: CUP prefers not to spell out this highly offensive racial slur. Always replace it with “n-----.” If you strongly disagree, please initiate a conversation with your acquisitions editor.

In general, look for any unintentional stereotypical or offensive language or imagery. For example, avoid dialect when not quoting someone directly, and be thoughtful with physical descriptions of people.

Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

General notes to keep in mind:

- A person’s sexuality and/or gender identity should be mentioned only when relevant.
- Private information about living individuals’ gender and sexuality should never be revealed without their consent.
- Whenever possible, ask the source how they would like to be described.

Gender vs. sex: Planned Parenthood has a helpful description of the differences here:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity>.

For a comprehensive list of terminology related to gender, sex, and sexuality, see PFLAG’s glossary: <https://pflag.org/glossary>.

Personal pronouns: Respect a person’s personal pronoun(s). Some transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive people identify as *he*, *she*, *ze*, *they*, or any number of gender-neutral pronouns. When in doubt, ask. Per *Chicago* 5.256, the use of *they* as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun should be respected.

Avoid deadnaming: Avoid using a transgender person’s former (pretransition) name unless they give explicit permission to do so.

Gender-inclusive language: When discussing something that is not gender specific, use gender-neutral language. See *Chicago* 5.255: Techniques for achieving gender neutrality.

Make sure your description of gender is accurate to the person or group being described. For example:

- Pregnant people (instead of pregnant women)
- People with uteruses (instead of women)

See also *Chicago* 5.257: Problematic gender-specific suffixes: Words with feminine suffixes such as *-ess* and *-ette* are better replaced with the suffix-free forms (for example, *chair*, *anchor*, *police officer*, *firefighter*, *mail carrier*).

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Age

Ageism is stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups on the basis of their age along with a tendency to view older persons as debilitated, unworthy of attention, or unsuitable for employment. Use person-centered language to avoid ageist language.

See LeadingAge's Anti-Ageism Quick Guide:

https://www.leadingage.org/sites/default/files/Anti-Ageism%20Quick%20Guide_FINAL.pdf

Helpful tips:

- Avoid stereotypes and generalizations.
- Avoid language and images that equate young with a positive status and old with a negative one.

Additional Considerations

Underprivileged: Consider alternatives to this term, such as *underserved* (when discussing access to services) and *under resourced* (as a more accurate way to frame larger issues).

Content Warnings for Offensive Language

If you feel it is appropriate to include language that is widely accepted to be offensive in your book, discuss it with your acquisitions editor. If you both agree, consider including a content warning for your readers in the form of an author note. Your editor can help you craft it. Here is one example that has been included in a CUP book:

In this book, I include quotations that contain racial slurs to adhere to the historical record; to fully communicate the sentiment conveyed by different historical actors; and,

most important, to contrast these slurs to different terms employed by the same actors or by other contemporaneous figures.