



# Inclusive Language Guide



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## What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is language that is both relevant and respectful and indicates to everyone from our diverse backgrounds and communities, that they are acknowledged and celebrated for their individuality and are equally valued and accepted members of wider society.

Language can be extremely powerful. It gives people the words to describe their experiences, to find their community and to advocate for change, but it can also be limiting, when used to capture complex and diverse human experiences, often with a single word or definition. Language that may have been widely used historically may now no longer be appropriate. While at the same time, for some, language that has historically been used as a slur or insult may be reclaimed and used as a positive or empowering term. Inclusive language should therefore always be at the forefront of how we communicate with others.

## Why is it important?

Language is a powerful tool in developing and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive culture and environment where everyone feels they can fully participate in study, employment and other opportunities at ECU. Inclusive language ensures that we avoid disrespectful and discriminatory language and have respectful conversations about ourselves and with others. While language can be used to empower and include people, it can be used negatively to reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to inequitable treatment.

At ECU we have a strong and maturing commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion and we acknowledge the benefits that diversity brings to our institution, allowing all of us to thrive. Everyone is entitled to see themselves positively reflected and acknowledged in our community, especially in the language we speak and write. Using inclusive language fosters an inclusive culture and delivers a curriculum that reflects the

natural diversity of human experiences. It also ensures we are complying with anti-discrimination policies and legislation.

## Inclusive language at ECU

ECU'S core values are *Integrity, Respect, Rational Inquiry, Personal Excellence and Courage*. All staff and students are expected to uphold the values in their personal and professional engagements. Therefore, we have a responsibility to ensure all of our interactions are respectful, and that we continue to cultivate a safe and supportive environment that is free from discrimination. This document is intended to provide guidance for the ECU community and assist in ensuring an inclusive and positive experience for everyone.

## A note on intersectionality

Intersectionality acknowledges the mixed nature of social factors such as race, class, ability, age, gender or one of the many other defining aspects of identity as they apply to a given individual or group, often creating an overlap and susceptibility to discrimination or disadvantage. Individuals experience society differently due to the unique intersections of their identities. Everyone's story and experiences are different. It is important to be mindful and aware that the identity groups we consider below, are not unvarying within themselves, nor are they mutually exclusive.

## Content warning

This document contains examples of negative language sometimes used toward minority groups, followed by their appropriate and inclusive replacement. This negative language is outdated, offensive and may be distressing for some. **It exists in this document only as an example of language to avoid.**

# ECU's Guiding Principles of Inclusive Language

- 1. Language matters:** Avoid excluding others or rendering people invisible with your language, including expressions that belittle, stereotype, focus on physical characteristics or trivialise others.
- 2. Person-centred approach:** Focus on the person rather than the demographic group they belong to (unless stated otherwise).
- 3. Strengths-based approach:** Focus on abilities, knowledge and capacities rather than a deficit approach such as perceived or supposed 'failings' of a person, or group of people.
- 4. Recovery-oriented approach:** Focus on language that conveys hope. This is particularly important in the context of mental health as language can promote optimism and support a person's recovery.
- 5. Empower to self-advocate:** Encourage others to speak for themselves. If you do need to speak on behalf of a group of people, consult widely to ensure that the language you use is reflective of the group and individuals with this lived experience.
- 6. Be aware of context:** Some terms are OK to use by people with lived experience as a means of claiming their identity, but some are not OK when used by others and can be seen as offensive.
- 7. Ask, where appropriate:** Ask someone how they would like to be known and addressed and respect their wishes. Don't make assumptions based on stereotypes.
- 8. Language is always evolving:** Seek continual learning about the meaning of words and how groups self-identify. Correct inappropriate or outdated language of others if it is safe to do so.
- 9. Be informed:** Be open to changing what you have always thought was common practice. It may be outdated and potentially offensive.
- 10. Learn from mistakes:** We can all make genuine mistakes in our language use. If you do make a mistake, apologise to the person(s) involved and avoid making the same mistake in the future.
- 11. Be aware of unconscious bias:** Sometimes we can say or do things that exclude others unintentionally. Constantly challenge and reflect on the language you use and why.



## Part 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

These guidelines provide an outline of best practice when engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important to be mindful of the diverse range of groups, languages and people across Australia, and as a result, this guidance cannot cover all individuals or communities. As always, if in doubt, it is best to discuss the preferences with the person involved.



### 1.1 Person-first language

In Australia, the word *Indigenous* has become a popular way to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While this isn't offensive as such, it is important to recognise why some people might not welcome this language. There are many people who do not appreciate being identified as *Indigenous* as this phrase doesn't respect and reflect the unique and diverse cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. With over 200 language groups in Australia, it also risks reducing distinct cultures into a homogenous group.

Similarly, phrases such as *First Nations* or *First Australians*, while acknowledging Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this land, can be problematic. *First*

*Australians* can be seen to be discounting the sovereignty of the nations that existed in Australia before colonisation. *First Nations* is a phrase used extensively throughout North America and while gaining in popularity in Australia, it is not preferred language when recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In summary, use the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rather than *Indigenous*, *First Nations* or *First Australians*, to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Where possible, identify and refer to people using local terms derived from their own languages – e.g., *Noongar*, *Martu*, *Yamatji*, but always check with a source before committing descriptions to writing.

### 1.2 Outdated and inappropriate language

These guidelines provide an outline of best practice when engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia has a history of language designed to dehumanise and minimise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, and traditions. Words such as *Aborigine*, *Native*, *Black* and *Blackfella* are not appropriate as they are used as nouns rather than the person-first language discussed in the 'Guiding Principles of Inclusive Language' section above. You may hear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use language such as *Black* or *Blackfella* but be mindful that if used by someone who isn't a part of that community, it may be seen as offensive. It is therefore important to avoid this language if you are not an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

In addition to these words, it is not appropriate to ask someone who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 'how much they are' or describe them as 'of Aboriginal descent', 'having Aboriginal heritage' or 'of Aboriginal background' as these phrases and questions do not relate to the full reality of what it is to be Aboriginal. Additionally, do not use terms that represent people in terms of 'racial purity', e.g. 'full-blood Aborigines', 'half-caste' and 'part-Aboriginal'.

These are racist and outdated terms used historically to oppress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### 1.3 Spelling and grammar

When it comes to terminology, ECU uses the spelling **Noongar** when referring to Aboriginal people from this country. While spellings such as *Nyungar* and *Nyoongar* are correct in that there are different ways of pronouncing Noongar, it is preferable to use just one style across the University, hence *Noongar*. The phrase 'Aboriginal' is preferred to be used as an adjective rather than a noun. Ensure you always capitalise the phrases '**Aboriginal**' and '**Indigenous**'.

#### Examples

Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
Blacks, Natives, Aborigines	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (do not shorten to an acronym)
Half-caste, part-Aboriginal	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
aboriginal, indigenous	Aboriginal, Indigenous peoples
Aboriginal tribes or clans	Aboriginal communities or language groups
How Aboriginal are you?	Who's your mob?

#### External resources

- [Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies – Indigenous Australians: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#)
- [Noongar Language Centre – Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation](#)
- [South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council – Kaartdijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge](#)
- [Mayakeniny – Restoring on-Country Performance: Noongar Performance and Language Resources](#)

## Part 2: Age

All students and staff are expected to create an environment where we don't stereotype or demean people based on our implicit bias and perceptions of personal characteristics, including age. At ECU, we have a wide age range of students and staff. Mature-aged students applying to study are usually defined as people 25 years or above.

### 2.1 Referring to age

Most of the time there is no need to refer to a person's age. Only refer to age when relevant to the context, and when it is necessary. Standalone words in everyday use, like 'old' and 'young', can carry bias or unintended subtext. Words that carry stereotypes, for example 'elderly' or 'youths' are also not acceptable. Instead, use 'older' or 'younger'. When an age or age range is relevant to a fact, you can use the term 'people' followed by the age reference e.g. people aged 18 to 25 years. When referring to students, ensure you refer to level of study and not age. When referring to staff, refer to someone's job title rather than their age.

### 2.2 Avoid Stereotypes

Avoid using stereotypes and do not consider them as fact e.g. 'Old people won't adapt to new technologies', 'Millennials are uncommitted and lazy'. Avoid language that makes assumptions based on stereotypes – for example, 'Despite her age, Jane is great at using this new software' or 'John did a great job for someone his age'.



Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
Seniors, elderly, old lady/old man, the aged,	Older people, older Australians, retired people, retirees
Emerging adult, kids, youths, juniors,	Younger people, young people, youth
People over x, People younger than x	Younger people, people aged e.g., 18 to 25
Mature age student	Non-school leaver

### External resources

- [Age discrimination – Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Workplace discrimination – Fair Work Ombudsman](#)
- [Australian Government Style Manual – Age Diversity](#)

## Part 3: Disability

All ECU staff and students are expected to use and promote inclusive language and behaviours when communicating to, or about, staff, students and other individuals with lived experience of disability. It is important to remember that not all disabilities are visible and not all individuals with a disability will be comfortable speaking openly about it. Someone may be categorised as having a disability, particularly when it comes to accessing services, but still not identify as a person with disability.



### 3.1 Person-first language

It is best practice to use person-first language until you know the language that someone uses for themselves. Person-first language puts the individual before the disability – we are all unique

and disability is one aspect of an individual that does not necessarily define someone's entire identity. Examples of person-first language include 'a person with disability/people with disability', 'a person who is blind or has low vision', or 'a person who is deaf or hard of hearing'. Other phrases include 'person living with disability', and 'person with lived experience of disability'. These can be inclusive of people who have experienced disability in the past, and sometimes people who are carers.

### 3.2 Identity-first language



Many people with disability embrace 'identity-first' language and do not use person-first language for themselves or their communities at all. For example, many autistic people identify as 'autistic' rather than 'a person with autism' and many deaf people identify as 'deaf', rather than 'a person who is deaf or hard of hearing'. This is largely because someone's disability can be integral to who they are as a person and how they interact with the world around them, and therefore one cannot be separated from the other. People need to be led by, respect and affirm each individual person's choice of language they use about themselves.

### 3.3 Avoid emotive language

Avoid emotive language relating to disability such as 'afflicted by,' 'victim' or 'sufferer.' This can reinforce negative stereotypes that people with disability are unhappy about their lives or should be pitied. The reality is, that for many people with disability, their disability is a fact of life and not something to be sensationalised. It should not be thought of as a condition that affects the 'special' or 'unfortunate few'.

Disability is a common and natural variation of the human experience. People with disability are individuals who don't want to be pitied, feared or ignored, or seen as somehow more heroic, courageous, patient, or 'special' than others. It is not unusual or unique for someone with disability to have talents, skills and abilities. Implying that a person with disability is courageous or special just for getting through the day is patronising and offensive.



### 3.4 Change the focus from 'disability' to 'accessibility'

It is not appropriate to ask or expect someone to share information about their disability, even though some people may volunteer this information willingly. Instead of asking someone about their disability and assuming what their needs are, ask about their 'accessibility requirements' or about the 'learning adjustments' they need in order to participate. When talking about spaces specifically for people with disability, such as parking, lifts and toilets, use the term 'accessible' rather than 'disabled' or 'handicapped.'

### 3.5 Avoid the term 'disclosure'

Avoid terminology around the 'declaration of disability' or 'disclosure of disability', as it can make it seem like the person is divulging a secret. Instead, use the simple phrase 'choose to share information about their disability/impairment', when talking about a person's choice to let their employer or colleagues know about their disability, or accessibility requirements.

#### Examples

Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
Abnormal, afflicted with or suffers from..., birth defect, deformed, invalid	Person with disability or disabled person (dependant on individual)
Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user
Vision impaired, visually impaired, the blind.	Person who is blind or has low vision, blind person (dependant on individual)
Aspie or Asperger's (no longer a diagnosis so only if someone self identifies), high or low functioning	Person with autism or autistic or neurodivergent (dependant on individual),
Deaf and dumb (inability to hear and speak does not imply intellectual disability)	Person who is deaf/hard of hearing or deaf person (dependant on individual)
Paraplegic	Person with paraplegia
Mentally handicapped, slow	Person with an intellectual disability
Handicapped parking	Accessible parking
Disabled toilet	Accessible toilet
Special requirements	Individual requirements
Learning impaired	Person with a learning disability
Suffers from a chronic health condition	Lives with or has a chronic health condition
Able-bodied, abled, normal	Person without a disability, non-disabled person

#### External resources

- [Australian Network on Disability](#)
- [Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training \(ADCET\)](#)
- [People with disabilities Western Australia](#)
- [Youth Disability Advocacy Network](#)
- [Identify-First vs Person-First Language.](#)
- [Sharing and Monitoring Disability Information in your Workforce Guide](#)

## Part 4: Sex, Gender and Sexuality



ECU is committed to equal opportunity for people of all genders, sexes, and sexualities. It is unlawful to discriminate against a person based on their sex, gender identity or intersex status under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth).



As the understanding of sex, gender and sexuality continues to evolve over time, so does the language used to capture and explore it.

Language can be extremely powerful. It gives people the words to describe their experiences, to find their community and to advocate for change – but it can also be limiting when used to try capture complex and diverse human experiences, often with a single word or definition. Language that may have been widely used historically may now no longer be appropriate. While at the same time, for some, language that has historically been used as a slur or insult may be reclaimed and used as a positive or empowering term.

Inclusive language conveys equality and is gender-neutral, so as not to make assumptions about people's identities, relationships, and

bodies. At the forefront of inclusive language for gender, sex and sexuality is respecting people's name, gender, pronouns, job titles and personal titles.

### 4.1 Differentiating between sex, gender and sexuality

Sex, gender, and sexuality are often conflated and confused with other aspects of someone's identity. It is important to understand that sex, gender, and sexuality are very different, but most importantly, that these aspects of someone's identity do not define them.

#### **Sex:** Our physical body. How our body develops and presents

Sex refers to a person's physical sex characteristics including hormones, chromosomes, internal reproductive system, and genitals. Although sex assignment at birth is typically only based on appearance of genitals, and limited to either female or male, we know that sex is much more complex – 1.7 per cent of the population are born with an intersex variation, meaning their physical self cannot be defined as male or female. This is a natural variation of bodily diversity.

#### **Gender:** Who we are. How we feel about ourself

Gender is our internal sense of self, how we feel about ourself, how we express ourself to the world and largely how we want the world to see us. Gender is a central part of a person's social and personal identity and may be expressed physically through appearance, dress and mannerisms as



well as socially through names and pronouns. Gender expectations and roles differ from culture to culture, but most cultures do recognise a gender binary of men/boys and women/girls. The *Australian Sex Discrimination Act 1984* recognises that a person can have a gender other than exclusively male or female and that a person's sex does not necessarily need to match their gender.

**Sexuality: How we feel about other people**

Sexuality describes a person's emotional, sexual



and/or romantic attractions to others. Sexuality takes into considerations a person's feelings and behaviour, and these may be towards someone of the same gender, another gender, all genders, no genders or a combination. Some people may choose a term to describe their identity such as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual or asexual. Some people may choose to describe their sexuality in terms of feelings, behaviours or experiences such as 'same sex' or 'gender attracted', or they may choose to use no term at all. Sexuality is widely considered to be fluid and while for some people this is a clear constant throughout their life, for others their sexuality can change over time.

**4.2 Gender-neutral language**

Gender-neutral language removes the assumption of gender. It allows us to include more people and reduces the risk of misgendering someone. This

does not mean that we cannot use gendered language to describe ourselves or someone else, these are simply alternatives for when we do not know the gender for somebody, or we are talking to a large group.

When referring to, or addressing, specific individuals, address them in a way that doesn't assume gender. Check the staff directory for how they have listed for themselves to be addressed and use this. Have consistency in the way all genders are referred to. If one person is addressed by their name, last name, courtesy title, or profession, then people of all genders should be. For a woman, if their title preference is not known, use Ms as this is more inclusive and refers to the person regardless of marital status.

**Examples**

Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
She/he is taking maternity leave	They are taking parental leave
She/he must provide copies	Every candidate must provide copies
Mother's facilities	Parenting facilities
Your husband/wife	Your partner
A father 'babysitting' for their child	A parent 'caring' for their child
Policeman/fireman	Police officer/firefighter
Ladies and Gentlemen	Esteemed guests
Boys and girls	Students, class, kids, everyone, folks
Mum and Dad	Parents and carers
Husband and wife, girlfriend and boyfriend	Partner
Brother and sister	Siblings
She or he	They
Chairman, mankind, Policeman	Chair/Chairperson, humankind, Police Officer
Feminine hygiene products	Period products, menstruation products
Pregnant women	Pregnant people

### 4.3 Referring to LGBTIQ+ Communities

The LGBTIQ+ acronym refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and questioning, and asexual people, as well as anyone who is diverse in sex, sexuality and/or gender, regardless of the term they use. While there are many ways to describe the community as a whole, ECU uses 'LGBTIQ+' to encompass the full range of diversity that exists within the community. LGBTIQ+ captures a broad range of diverse and complex human experiences as it can be difficult to capture this fully with just one word. Always use the language someone uses to describe themselves.

### 4.4 Don't assume name, title and pronouns

**Names:** The name/s someone is referred by can hold a lot of meaning for people, and in some cases, can affirm a person's gender. Some trans, gender diverse and non-binary people will use their name to reflect their gender whether that be masculine, feminine or gender neutral. Some may choose to keep their legal name even if it implies a gender that is not their own because they have connection to it. Others may choose a name that simply better reflects who they are and how they feel about themselves. If someone asks you to use a different name for them, even if that is not what is legally recorded, it is important to respect that and make the effort.

**Titles:** Mr, Miss, Mrs, Ms are examples of common titles used throughout Australia. These usually imply a person's gender and, in some cases, can imply a person's marital status too (historically Miss has been used for unmarried women, while Mrs was used for married women). You may start to see Mx (pronouns as M-X or Mix) included as a gender-neutral title option. Avoid using job titles that end in '-man' or '-woman' such as policeman – use 'police officer' instead. There are also a range of job titles which specifically have applied to women, for example 'waitress' as opposed to 'waiter' – you can use waiter for both. Gender is not relevant to a person's profession or title in general. Use

gender-specific adjectives only when gender is relevant.

**Pronouns:** Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns. Gendered or personal pronouns are the words we use to describe people when we aren't using their name. The pronouns used for someone can play an important role in that person affirming their gender to the world. We often assume a person's pronouns are based on their perceived gender or presentation – this is not the case, and it's important we don't make assumptions. The most common pronouns used in Australia are:

- She/Her/Hers which are typically used for feminine people,
- He/Him/His which are typically used for masculine people, and;
- They/Them/Theirs which can be used for people of all genders and/or people who do not identify with using 'she' or 'he'.

### 4.5 Written communication

When writing, avoid using gender specific pronouns or gendered terms. If you are writing a formal document, the most inclusive way to refer to people is they/them. Using they as a singular pronoun is grammatically correct and is endorsed by the American Psychological Association (APA) in scholarly writing. If possible, leave out pronouns altogether. In correspondence, mimic what the sender has used in previous correspondence or ask them what their title is. If you don't have this information, just use their first name. When corresponding via a telephone/teleconference/videoconference, remember that what a person looks like or sounds like is not always an indicator of their gender. Therefore, don't address someone by gendered terms such as Ms/Mr, call them by their name.



#### 4.6 Cultural considerations

It is important to be aware that culture can impact how a person may view and experience sex, gender and sexuality. This can vary significantly across countries, cultures and religions, and views can be influenced by specific histories, cultural patterns, and social and political contexts.

##### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people

It is important be aware that culture can impact how a person may view and experience sex, gender and sexuality. This can vary significantly across countries and cultures.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may not use LGBTIQ+ to describe themselves e.g. ‘Sistergirl’ and ‘Brotherboy’ are terms used by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe transgender people.

A **sistergirl** is someone who was assigned male at birth but has a female spirit and takes on female roles within the community, including looking after children and family. Many sistergirls live a traditional lifestyle and have strong cultural backgrounds. The spelling and use of this term may differ from area to area. A **brotherboy** is a term used by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe gender diverse people who have a male spirit and take on male roles within the community. Brotherboys often have a strong sense of their cultural identity. The spelling and use of this term may differ from area to area.

In a broader context, the terms ‘sistagirl’ and ‘brothaboy’ are used as terms of endearment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with no reference to gender diversity.

#### Examples

Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
Gay and lesbian, the gay community	The LGBTIQ+ community
Lez, lesbo, lezzie	Lesbian
Homosexual, homo	Gay, gay man, gay person
Lifestyle choice, sexual preference	Sexuality
Born male, born female	Assigned or presumed male or female at birth
He or she	They (if you don't know their gender or they use they/them pronouns)
Transsexual, transgendered, crossdresser	Transgender, trans, gender diverse, non-binary
Transvestite	Crossdresser
Hermaphrodite (Offensive and physically impossible in humans)	Intersex person, someone with an intersex variation
Ladies and gents, boys and girls	Everyone, guests, folks
Preferred name, preferred pronouns	Name and pronouns
Identifies as transgender, gay, bisexual etc	Is transgender, gay, bisexual etc
Husband/wife	Partner, spouse
Gay agenda, homosexual agenda	Use an accurate description of topic e.g. Discrimination laws
Special rights	Equal rights

## External resources

- [Sex Discrimination Act 1984](#)
- [Gender and Sexual Diversity Style Manual](#)
- [GLAAD Media Reference Guide – Terms to Avoid](#)
- [QLife Tip Sheet - Glossary](#)
- [LGBTIQ+ Health Australia](#)
- [Living Proud](#)
- [TransFolk of WA](#)
- [Intersex Human Rights Australia](#)



## Part 5: Race, Ethnicity and Culture

ECU plays host to people from a wide range of cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds and identities. Our students and staff bring with them their identities and experiences that may have been strongly influenced by the cultures of their families, the places they have lived in, and the interactions between all the different aspects of themselves.

### 5.1 Cultural diversity

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) defines cultural diversity as: *The variation between people in terms of how they identify on a range of dimensions including ancestry, ethnicity, ethno-religiosity, language, national origin, race, and/or*

*religion*. Being part of a community that embraces the various cultural differences of staff and students is linked with ECU's core values.

Even where someone's cultural practice may not align with your own, it is important to understand where that practice may come from. If referring to a particular cultural practice, consider if it is necessary to describe it and what terms someone from that culture might use, if you are not from that background yourself.

### 5.2 Racism

Racist acts and words are never acceptable, breach ECU policy and are potentially illegal. This includes slurs towards someone based on their perceived race or ethnicity, threats of violence, offensive comments, 'jokes' that target a particular ethnicity, bullying, and harassment. Unfortunately, not all racism will be obvious.

Racism can occur in the following ways:



1. **Overt racism** refers to intentional and/or obvious harmful attitudes or behaviours towards a marginalised group because of their race, ethnicity or culture. This is what people usually think of when they talk about racism, however racism is much more complex than this type alone.
2. **Everyday racism** refers to any remarks that use negative stereotypes or prejudice to say something about a person's race or ethnicity. Even when the intent is not to harm someone, it can still have a psychological and emotional impact.

People may experience adverse effects on their physical and mental health when targeted by casual racism.

3. **Covert racism** is harder to address, as these may not always be evident in language used but can include deliberately mispronouncing names or referring to a group by using cultural stereotypes.
4. **Systemic racism** refers to the situation when the society or institution has practices that discriminate against particular groups of people, and is more to do with the system, than an individual's own standing. It can be *Institutional*, where racism is normalised and accepted, or *Structural*, where inequalities lead to exclusion of people.

### 5.3 Person-centric language

Only reference someone's background when it is appropriate to do so. Avoid highlighting someone's ethnicity as a way of singling them out from a group, or marking them as different e.g. if introducing someone, avoid stating that they are from another country when you have not done the same for others.

If it is relevant to include their cultural identity or ethnicity, avoid generalisations or making the person's identity invisible e.g. referring to someone simply as 'African' rather than saying what country they are from. Where it is possible, refer to the person involved as how they describe themselves and what they are comfortable with.

### 5.4 Avoid stereotypes

Avoid making assumptions or using stereotypes based on race, ethnicity or culture. Old models of cultural awareness did use stereotypes as a way of navigating cultures, but this is a very prescriptive model and reduces individuals to a set of characteristics. Stereotypes do not have to be negative to be hurtful – even positive stereotypes meant to compliment someone may alienate them e.g. 'Your English is so good'

indicates an assumption about someone's language skills based on their race or ethnicity, marking them as 'other'.

### 5.5 Cross-cultural communication

When communicating with people who come from a different background, use simple and accessible language. Avoid using a condescending or patronising tone or language. Be aware of what meanings words and phrases may carry in other cultures, and appropriate ways of addressing people.

### 5.6 Identity and reclamation

Some groups may use particular terms that were once considered derogatory to refer to themselves. This is part of a process referred to as *reclaiming language*. This is usually extended to people within the affected group and unless otherwise stated or widely known, people outside the group should avoid using these terms.

#### Examples

Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
Black/Brown/Yellow/Red/Purple people OR Coloured person	Person of colour (POC)
An African (broad generalisation)	Person of Kenyan descent (specific)
Foreigners	International people, international students
Mixed race	Biracial, multiracial
Third world country	Developing country

#### External Resources

- [All Together Now](#)
- [Ethnic Communities Council WA](#)
- [Racism. It Stops With Me](#)
- [Racism in Australia](#)
- [What is Racism? – Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

## Part 6: Religion and Belief

We are committed to ensuring an inclusive learning and work environment for people of all backgrounds, cultures and faiths. Religion and belief can be a deeply individual aspect to someone's identity and may or may not be manifested externally. It may also affect their interactions and requirements. Language around religion and belief can be difficult to define, but principles of inclusivity should be applied to any reference to someone's faith.

### 6.1 Person-first language

Only reference someone's religion or belief where it is appropriate to do so. Avoid highlighting someone's belief as a way of singling them out from a group or marking them as different e.g. if introducing someone, avoid referring to their religion even if it is externally manifested. *If it is relevant* to include their religious identity, avoid generalisations or reducing their identity to a point of curiosity. Where it is possible, refer to the person involved as to how they describe themselves and what they are comfortable with.

### 6.2 Use appropriate terms

Use appropriate terms to reference particular practices, places, food or clothing items e.g., Muslims will pray *salah/namaz* (depending on the intersection with culture and language) and may visit the *Musallah* to do so. They may choose to eat *Halal* food or wear a headscarf known colloquially as a *hijab*. Conversely a Jewish person may *observe Shabbat* or *Shabbos* and eat *Kosher* food. Using the incorrect term, whether deliberately or out of ignorance, serves to reinforce that the person is not considered part of the overall community and can alienate them.

### 6.3 Avoid stereotypes and misinformation

Avoid making assumptions or using stereotypes based on religion. Unfortunately, there are many stereotypes that have found their way into common use based on negative reports on world events, propaganda, and fear of the 'other'. Some

of these statements stem from xenophobia and can target specific groups e.g. anti-Semitism towards Jewish people and Islamophobia towards Muslims. This language is inappropriate and should be avoided. This includes conflating a religious belief with a particular action e.g. referring to terrorism specifically when there is some link with Islam.



Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
God-botherer	A person of faith
Believes in the sky-fairy/imaginary being	A believer (in God or other deity)
Bible-basher	Christian
Towelhead, raghead	A person wearing a hijab or turban
Religious food or God food	Kosher/Halal (relevant terminology) dietary requirement
Conflating a negative action with a faith e.g. Islamic terrorism	Keeping a faith separate from an action
Christian name	First name, given name, affirmed name

### External Resources

- [Diversity of Religion and Spiritual Beliefs – Racism No Way](#)

## Part 7: Mental Health

We are committed to supporting students and staff who may be experiencing mental health problems and recognise that recovery-oriented language as opposed to stigmatising language, is key in our approach. It is important not to label someone with a mental health problem and recognise that many people do not have a mental health diagnosis. The use of the phrase ‘mental health problem’ or mental health concern’ is more appropriate in this context, with ‘mental ill-health’ being representative of both problems and diagnoses. People experiencing mental health problems are often invisible in our community. By using person-first, recovery-oriented language, that is age-appropriate, we can facilitate an inclusive community for people experiencing mental health problems.

### 7.1 Person-first language

It is best practice to use a person-first approach when talking with or about someone who may be developing or experiencing a mental health problem or is in crisis. Their mental health is one aspect of their identity and does not represent their entire identity. You would only reference someone’s mental health problem where it is appropriate to do so and with the consent of the person experiencing mental health concerns. The exception to this would be where there is a risk of harm to self or others.

It is important to put the individual before the mental health problem or diagnosis. Examples of person-first language include ‘a person living with bipolar disorder’ or ‘a person experiencing a mental health crisis’. Unfortunately, film and media over the years have portrayed stereotypes for people experiencing mental health problems, with stigmatising labels such as ‘psycho’ and ‘mental’.

### 7.2 Recovery-oriented language

Language should be strengths based and convey acceptance and respect for the person experiencing mental illness or mental health problems. Emphasising abilities as opposed to limitations is key. Acknowledging that people experiencing mental health problems may express their thoughts, feelings and behaviours in a range of ways is important. Discussing someone’s ‘conduct’ in a punitive sense may be detrimental to their recovery, as opposed to highlighting their abilities and strengths. Similarly, discussing someone’s history and experiences may cause re-traumatisation, so using recovery-oriented language emphasising strengths, is trauma-informed.

#### Examples

Language and practice to avoid	Good inclusive language practice
mentally ill, crazy, mental	person with a mental health problem or person living with (or experiencing) a mental health problem
schizo, psycho	person living with schizophrenia or person living with psychosis
suffers from, or a victim of	lives with or has a diagnosis of or has lived experience of
addict	uses substances
mental institution	mental health unit (or other accurate description of treatment facility)
shrink	psychiatrist
committed suicide or successful suicide	suicided or died by suicide or took their own life
political suicide	It is recommended that you should refrain from using the term suicide in other contexts

### 7.3 Cultural considerations

It is important to be aware that culture can impact how a person may experience or express their mental health concerns. In some cultures, living with a mental health problem or diagnosis may bring guilt and/or shame. They may feel uncomfortable to name or describe their concerns. It is important to gain an understanding of how a person's culture may shape their experience and use language appropriately in this context.

### 7.4 Age-appropriate language

Although you don't have to share the same contemporary colloquial language of a younger person, you may need to accept a range of language used to express thoughts, feelings and behaviours, of someone experiencing mental health problems. This may allow you to 'sit' with the person and understand how they are feeling, without judgement. Less formal language in your response may allow better connection and enable the conversation. Take care when instigating 'goal setting' or talking of future aspirations as a young person experiencing mental health problems may struggle to see the future and breaking the conversation into 'steps forward' may assist. Language used in this way can convey hope that there is a way forward when life feels overwhelming.

Also consider the medium for your language. Some younger people may feel more comfortable engaging in a conversation online rather than face-to-face and may open up more about their mental health concerns via this medium. Regardless of age, it is important to ensure that people feel autonomy and support to make decisions about themselves and this can be conveyed through the language that we use.

### 7.5 Talking about suicide

A lot of people find talking about suicide confronting. It is important to be sensitive to language around suicide but also as a community to not avoid conversations about suicide, contributing to the stigma surrounding this topic. The use of some language about suicidal ideation is unhelpful, particularly where people are labelled as 'attention seeking'. It is important to acknowledge people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours for what is being displayed, as opposed to verbalising assumptions and/or judgments regarding these behaviours. The word 'commit' when referring to suicide has historical context, dating back to when suicide was a crime in some states of Australia, never in WA. The language 'commit suicide' or 'committed suicide' is outdated and should no longer be used. People who experience suicidal ideation need our support as opposed to feeling condemned by the use of inappropriate language. The Mindframe Guidelines on language, including guides for the media, are a useful resource for ensuring language around suicide is non-stigmatising.

For crisis support at any time, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/>.

The Out of Hours Crisis Line is available to ECU students outside of business hours. Call 1300 583 032 or text 0488 884 232.

#### External Resources

- [Mindframe Guidelines](#)
- [Recovery Oriented Language Guide](#)

## Part 8: Further information

### 8.1 Resource Background

This resource has been written by those using their personal and professional lived expertise and has been consulted on thoroughly, however language does change and evolve over time, and we welcome any feedback and further input.

### 8.2 ECU Corporate Writing Guide

This resource is in alignment with and supported by [ECU's Corporate Writing Guide](#). See 'Writing within ECU' for more information.

### 8.3 Diversity Council Australia (DCA)

ECU is proud to be a member of Diversity Council Australia (DCA). We have utilised their knowledge and resources to form our guiding principles in inclusive language. For further information about inclusive language in the workplace, refer to their '[Words at Work](#)' resource.

### 8.4 Internal Support and Information

For further information about this document, please contact [ECU's Equity Projects Team](#) who is responsible for the implementation of projects and initiatives to ensure ECU is a safe and inclusive place for everyone. Additionally, you may wish to contact the following:

- [Athena Swan Advancement Scheme](#) is part of ECU's commitment to and celebration of the gender diversity of our staff talent at ECU, supporting career progression in the spirit of the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE).
- [ECU Student Guild](#) has several student-run equity clubs which exist to support and connect students including the Mature Age Student Network, Ethnocultural Collective, Queer Collective, Women's Community and ECU Wellbeing Community.
- [Equity, Diversity and Disability Service](#) provides support for students with diverse study needs, particularly students with a permanent or temporary disability or medical condition which may impact on their participation at ECU, or who care for a family member with a disability or medical condition.
- [Kurongkurl Katitjin](#) is the Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research at Edith Cowan University. Kurongkurl Katitjin, pronounced *koor-ong-kurl cut-it-chin*, is a Noongar phrase meaning "coming together to learn". Their mission is to "provide excellence in teaching, learning and research in a culturally inclusive environment that values the diversity of Indigenous Australian history and cultural heritage".
- [The ALLY Network](#) is a group of likeminded ECU staff who actively and visibly support the rights and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ populations through visibility, awareness raising and activities.
- [University Contact Officers](#) (UCOs) are available to provide information to students and staff who are, or feel that they may have been, the subject of bullying, harassment or discrimination at ECU. UCOs can provide information on relevant policies and procedures in conjunction with the services available to assist in resolving an issue or concern.