



Inclusive Language Guide

WORDS MATTER

Less Inclusive vs. More Inclusive Terms
and Microaggressions Edition



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Language is mighty. It is a powerful tool that can connect us, teach us, and foster understanding. It's an essential component for creating an inclusive environment. However, we must acknowledge that language can also divide us and cause harm when not used thoughtfully.

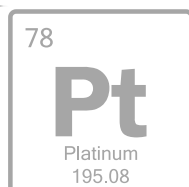
We can all do better by using inclusive language that treats all people with the respect, dignity, and fairness that each of us deserves. Part of that is a better understanding of the power of inclusive language.

So, what is inclusive language? Inclusive language avoids expressions that exclude, stereotype, discriminate, or assign negative connotations to personal characteristics of certain people and communities. Examples of inclusive language are person-first language (person with a disability vs. disabled) and asset-based language (support vs. help).

What is this guide and who is it for? This guide contains an overview of words and phrases that have either been rooted in a divisive history or more aligned with modern terms. The guide is designed for individuals and organizations aiming to foster a culture of appreciation and belonging. It is an accessible resource for you and your team members, promoting an inclusive workplace environment that welcomes everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or any other dimension of diversity.

Keep evolving! Inclusive language is about growth, not word policing. It demands patience and grace for everyone on the journey, including ourselves, as we strive to communicate more empathetically.

This guide should be used as a foundational reference. It's important to continue learning and asking questions. Whenever possible, ask for the person's preferred terminology. One person may prefer "senior," while another person with the same age number may prefer "older adult." With this in mind, this guide should be considered a living document.



The Platinum Rule: Treat others the way they want to be treated, not the way you want to be treated. Approach coworkers with curiosity and the goal of connection and community in your workplace.



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	Less Inclusive	More Inclusive
Age	Senior/Junior	Older Adult, Older Person, Aged Adult / Younger Person
	Elderly	An Elder
Gender		
	Ladies, Gentlemen, Ma'am, Sir, Guys, Gals	Folks, Y'all, Friends, Team, You All
	Girls, Female	Woman, Women
	Mother, Father	Parent
	Chairman	Chair, Chairperson
	Manpower	People Power, workforce
	Mankind	Humankind
	Man Hours	Investment, Team Hours
	Grandfathered/Grandfather clause	Legacy, Pre-approved
	Bossy, Toxic	Driven, Strong
	Opposite Sex	Different Sex
	Housekeeping	Maintenance, Clean-up
	Ombudsman	Ombuds Services Representative
	Abort, Kill	Cancel, Fail, Close, End Halt
	Race	
Blacklist, Whitelist		Denylist, Allowlist
Master		Primary, Control, Main, Original, Source
Master/Slave (files)		Primary/Standby, Parent/Child
Minority		POC or BIPOC, historically excluded/marginalized
Tribe		Squad, Team
Limited English Proficiency	English Language Learners, Emergent Bilingual	



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	Less Inclusive	More Inclusive
Disability	Crippled	Impacted, Degraded, Restricted, Immobilized
	Blind Spot/Blind Hiring	Missing Piece, Anonymous Hiring
	Tone Deaf	Insensitive, Unaware
	Handicapped	Person with a disability
Class	Low Income	Experiencing Poverty
	Underserved	Groups with less access
	Marginalized	Those pushed to the margins
	At-risk	Do not use or qualify "at risk for what?"
LGBTQ+	Maternity/Paternity	Parental or Family
	Opposite sex	Other gender
	Homosexual	LGBTQ, Gay, Gay Man, Lesbian, Queer person, Bisexual
Asset Based	Need(s)	Priorities, Interests
	Improve	Grow, Enhance
	Help	Support, Guide, Encourage
	Empower	Ignite, Connect, Inspire

References

- <https://content-guide.18f.gov/our-style/inclusive-language/>
- <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>
- <https://glaad.org/reference>



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Microaggression: By definition, it is a brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental insult, whether intentional or unintentional, directed toward a socially marginalized group. We think of them as the everyday nicks and cuts that can hurt people around you with your words, actions, and places you occupy.

Microaggressions can be subtle and difficult to identify, but they can have a cumulative and negative impact on the mental and physical health of people pushed to the margins. They can also reinforce negative stereotypes and create a hostile environment.

Micro-Messaging	Potential Impact	What to Say Instead
"You are so articulate."	Can imply people of color are less intelligent than whites.	"Great job on your presentation. Well done."
"Where are you really from?"	Can imply someone is not American.	"What was something pivotal in your life that made you who you are today?"
"I don't see color."	Can imply someone doesn't want to acknowledge race.	"Do you feel like our workplace supports someone of your ethnicity and background?"
"Man up."	Can imply that a person's emotions are not valid.	"Do you want to chat about what's going on?" or "You've got this!"
"You should smile more."	Can imply you are controlling or condescending.	"Good morning/afternoon/evening!"
"Do you speak English?"	Can imply you think Hispanic persons are non-English speakers.	"Hello. How are you?"
"You're probably really good at math."	Can imply all Asian people lack communication and creativity.	"How can we team up together on a project?"
"You're so bossy/aggressive."	Can imply women should be more passive in meetings.	"You are driven. I see why you're exceeding your goals."
"Why are you always so angry?"	Can imply the person should be more compliant.	"How can I support you?"
"Can you really do your job?"	Can imply persons with disabilities are less than capable.	Say nothing.
"That's so gay."	Not only is this demeaning it can imply sharing who you are isn't safe.	Say nothing. Or better yet, be positive. "I have an idea to improve that."



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Thank you for taking the first step toward inclusive communications. Recognizing and adjusting our language for inclusivity is pivotal for enhancing team collaboration, minimizing misunderstandings, and cultivating a respectful and engaged workplace.

It's crucial to acknowledge that not all micro-messaging is negative; there's also the power of micro-affirmations—supporting, complementing, building, and collaborating. Practically speaking, avoid jargon, acronyms, or casual language that may unintentionally exclude team members. When uncertain, don't hesitate to ask, and know that your efforts contribute to a positive and inclusive work environment.

Should we work together?

Whether your organization needs an assessment of its current culture, a customized workshop for teams and leaders, or support with resource groups, we are here to provide the solutions our clients need. For more information about our suite of services, please visit hintonandco.com.

References

[A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions](#)

[Flip the Script: Gender Stereotypes in the Workplace](#) -Catalyst, 2024

[Flip the Script: Race and Ethnicity in the Workplace](#) -Catalyst, 2024

[Flip the Script: Sexual Orientation in the Workplace](#) -Catalyst, 2024



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