

Using Inclusive Language in Scholarly Writing: A Roundtable Discussion, July 13, 2023

A roundtable discussion with Monica Lypson, MD, MHPE, Jennifer Potter, MD, and Javeed Sukhera, MD, PhD, FRCPC, moderated by Charles Rhoads

- **What is inclusive language?**
 - Language that accurately and inclusively describes the members of a community
 - Language that uses terms that many in the community use for themselves
 - Language that shows respect and calls people in in their wholeness
 - Defined language so authors, editors, reviewers, and readers have a shared understanding of the meaning
- **Follow the platinum rule: Treat others as they would like to be treated.**

Language is always evolving, and there may not be agreement about the best terminology to use to describe a particular community. Engage with the community you are writing about and ask them how they self-identify. Then use their terminology in your writing.
- **Engage your professional network for help with inclusive language.**

Your research team, mentors, and the communities you're writing about can help you. You don't have to go at it alone. Be open and receptive to the feedback that you receive and adjust accordingly if needed.
- **There is no perfect way to be inclusive, no one right answer to every complex question.**

Always strive to show respect and be person-centered and inclusive in the language you use. Create space in your language for ambiguity and richness rather than a right term-wrong term dichotomy. At the same time, know that everyone will make mistakes. Give yourself and others space and grace to learn and try again. Be sure there are opportunities for good faith questions and concerns to be discussed.
- **Comfort and confidence using evolving language will come with practice.**

Use your scholarly writing as an opportunity to slow down, reflect on your own positionality, and invite others in to provide feedback and guidance. Take the time to become comfortable using new language. In doing so, you can role model best practices and help readers think differently about the language they use in their own writing.

Additional Recommendations and Resources

- **Define all acronyms in your writing**, so editors, reviewers, and readers understand exactly who you're referring to. When using "catchall acronyms" (e.g., LGBTQIA+, BIPOC), be sure you are talking about all the communities included in the acronym. If not, consider using a different acronym or term to be more precise.
- **Provide "thick descriptions"** in your writing to describe a community in all its nuance and context. Start by using all the words you need to accurately describe the community you're writing about. Then edit down your writing to be more concise where possible. Don't use shortcuts from the start.
- **Tell editors, reviewers, and readers why you chose the language you did.** Be explicit in your writing about the decisions you made and why you made them. Consider including a reflexivity or position statement to describe your identity, experiences, and approach to the topic so readers understand where you're coming from.

The panelists shared the following resources to learn more:

- Toolkits for Equity [Guidelines on Inclusive Language and Images in Scholarly Communication](#) from the Coalition for Diversity & Inclusion in Scholarly Communications
- [Advancing Health Equity: A Guide to Language, Narrative and Concepts](#) from the AMA and the AAMC Center for Health Justice
- [How Do I Ensure My Language Is Inclusive?](#) from the Anti-Defamation League
- [Foundational Concepts and Affirming Terminology Related to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Sex Development](#) from the Harvard Medical School Sexual and Gender Minority Health Equity Initiative
- [Learning Resources](#) from the National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center
- NIH Style Guide on [Race and National Origin](#); [Sex, Gender, and Sexuality](#); and [Inclusive and Gender-Neutral Language](#)

These key moments and helpful resources are from a monthly webinar series hosted by the editorial teams of the AAMC's 2 peer-reviewed journals, Academic Medicine and MedEdPORTAL. Sessions cover the importance of publishing your education scholarship and practical suggestions for how to do so successfully. All are invited to attend. [Learn more about upcoming sessions.](#)