

# Inclusive language in academic writing

Language reflects and shapes an individual’s and community’s culture, values, and knowledge, both positively and negatively. As society evolves so too does language and language practices. Inclusive language practices are an accepted part of Australian society, supported by state and national legislative frameworks (University of South Australia (UniSA), 2020), and reflect respect and recognition of human diversity and differing beliefs, experiences, and lifestyles.

UniSA reflects its commitment to inclusive language through its policy and principles and it is implicit in many of the Graduate Qualities UniSA graduates are expected to have developed in their studies (UniSA, 2020). This policy states that all members of UniSA’s community use inclusive language in “all academic and administrative written and spoken communication” (UniSA, 2020).

## What exactly is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is:

- respectful language which values, includes, and empowers all members.
- “free from words, phrases or tones that demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, infantilise or trivialise people” based on an attribute, characteristic or group membership (University of Queensland (UQ), n.d., p.2).

## How to show inclusive language in your academic writing

It is important to consider:

- Is referring to attributes or characteristics relevant, necessary, or important to the context?
- If yes, are the references to attributes or characteristics expressed in inclusive language (UQ, n.d., p.3).

The table below identifies some current inclusive language practices. \*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use capitals when referring to ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’, ‘Aboriginal peoples’, ‘Torres Strait Islander peoples’, ‘Elders’, ‘an Aboriginal person’, and ‘First Nations people’.</li> <li>• Use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in full and don’t abbreviate to ‘ATSI’.</li> <li>• If relevant, refer to an Aboriginal person by their language group e.g., a Kurna person.</li> <li>• Avoid terms which reflect people as less than whole in terms of their ancestry such as ‘half-caste’ or ‘part Aboriginal’ (UniSA, 2021).</li> </ul>
Age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use inclusive language for all age groups.</li> <li>• Use ‘older adults’, ‘older people’, ‘the older population’ or ‘younger people’ <b>not</b> ‘old people’, ‘the elderly’, ‘elderly people’, ‘seniors’, ‘senior citizens’ or ‘the aged’.</li> </ul>

<b>Cultural and linguistic diversity</b>
(For guidelines regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples see previous page)
<p>Use capitals when referring to nationalities or religions such as Thai, Italian, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.</p> <p>If relevant, important, or necessary to specify the ethnicity of a person/group, or to distinguish between those born in Australia and overseas, use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>phrases that refer to a person/group's background or origin e.g., person of German descent, Australians of Irish background.</li> <li>qualifiers with the noun Australian e.g., Greek-Australian, Vietnamese-born Australian, Swahili-speaking Australian, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Gender and sexual diversity</b>
<p>Where possible, use language which treats gender equally by using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gender neutral or gender equity language e.g., chair <b>not</b> chairman, people <b>not</b> mankind</li> <li>non-binary or gender-neutral personal pronouns e.g., the client must give <i>their</i> approval.</li> <li>titles or modes of address which are parallel and not linked to marital status e.g., Mr/Ms,</li> <li>words of equal status e.g., spouse, parent, colleague, staff (Griffith n.d.)</li> </ul>
<b>People with disability</b>
<p>Usually, use person-first language. This mean putting the person first, not the disability or condition. Preferred language is a person/people 'who has/have', 'with' or 'lives/live with', such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>people with a disability; a child who has epilepsy; people who live with physical disabilities.</li> </ul> <p>However, some specific groups prefer identify-first language. This includes the autistic, Deaf and blind communities where 'a deaf person', 'the Deaf community', or 'a blind person' are acceptable (Government of South Australia, 2020, p.10).</p> <p>Avoid language which defines the disability as a limitation, such as 'confined to a wheelchair' (rather 'they use a wheelchair' or 'they are wheelchair users') (Government of South Australia, 2020, p.10)</p>

\* As language practices evolve, check that the above-mentioned language practices are still correct.

## References

- Government of South Australia. (2020). *Report it right: Guidelines for portraying people with disability*. [https://inclusive.sa.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/124148/Report-it-Right\\_Media-Guidelines\\_2021\\_FA.pdf](https://inclusive.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/124148/Report-it-Right_Media-Guidelines_2021_FA.pdf)
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- University of Queensland. (n.d.). *UQ guide to using inclusive language*. <https://staff.uq.edu.au/files/242/using-inclusive-language-guide.pdf>
- University of South Australia. (2020). *Inclusive language - policies and procedures*. <https://i.unisa.edu.au/policies-and-procedures/university-policies/corporate/c-1/>