



PERSON-FIRST AND IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

About this Resource

The Person-First and Identity-First Language Glossary aims to raise awareness and support the use of culturally sensitive terms and phrases that center the voices and perspectives of those who are often marginalized or stereotyped. It explains the origins of problematic terms and phrases and suggests alternatives. This glossary will continue to evolve as new terminology emerges or current language becomes outdated.

Written in collaboration between the Governor's Office of the Chief Disability Officer, the Governor's Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the New York State Office of Language Access, this document draws from the American Psychological Association's inclusive language guidelines. Furthermore, it incorporates feedback from New York State [Agency Language Access Coordinators](#). Eriksen Translations and Avantpage Translations worked on the translation and cultural adaption of this glossary into various languages.

The Person-First and Identity-First Language Glossary is a valuable tool for all who champion equity, diversity, and inclusion in the space where they live, work and play. For the latest glossary or any questions, contact the [New York State Office of Language Access](#) at LanguageAccess@ogs.ny.gov.

Person-First vs. Identity-First Language

Person-first language *emphasizes the person*, not their disability, chronic condition or other facet of their identity that has resulted in underrepresentation and discrimination, including sexual orientation, gender expression, age and more. Identity-first language *focuses on the disability, chronic condition or other identity facet*, allowing the individual to claim and choose their own identity rather than permitting others to define it for them. Additionally, identity-first language is often used as an expression of cultural pride and a way to reclaim a disability, chronic condition or identity facet that was once considered negative. Initially, the discussion of person-first versus identity-first language pertained only to people with disabilities. However, over time, it has grown to include other identity groups.

When writing about identity, you are encouraged to use terms and descriptions that recognize and explain person-first and identity-first perspectives. However, please be mindful that terms and phrases considered acceptable in some languages and cultures may be deemed derogatory in others. Societal norms around language and preferred terms and phrases may vary depending on the language being spoken, the cultural context, the speaker, and other factors. **It is permissible to use either perspective or a mix of both until an individual or identity group clearly defines their preferred perspective, in which case this preference should be respected and used moving forward.**





Terms to Avoid and Suggested Alternatives

Age

ageism: stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups based on their age. Ageism can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices or institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs.

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ the elderly ✘ elderly people ✘ the aged ✘ aging ✘ dependents ✘ seniors ✘ senior citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ older adults ✔ older people ✔ the aging community ✔ persons 65 years and older ✔ the older population 	Avoid using terms such as “seniors,” “elderly,” “the aged,” “aging dependents,” and similar “othering” terms because they connote a stereotype and suggest that members of the group are not part of society but rather a group apart.

Disability status

ableism: stereotyping, prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory behavior and social oppression toward people with disabilities to inhibit the rights and well-being of people with disabilities, which is currently the largest minority group in the United States.

Use of person-first and identity-first language rather than condescending terms

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ handicapped ✘ special need ✘ physically challenged ✘ mentally challenged ✘ mentally retarded ✘ handi-capable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person with a disability ✔ person who has a disability ✔ person with an intellectual disability ✔ person with a congenital disability ✔ person with a birth disability ✔ person with a physical disability 	Use person-first or identity-first language as is appropriate for the community or person being discussed. The language used should be selected with the understanding that a person with a disability has their expressed preference regarding identification, which supersedes matters of style. Avoid terms that are condescending or patronizing.





Disability status (Continued)

Use of person-first and identity-first language rather than condescending terms

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ mentally ill ✘ defective ✘ nuts ✘ crazy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person with a mental health condition ✔ person with a mental health disability

Description of Deaf, DeafBlind and hard-of-hearing people

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ person with deafness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Deaf person 	Many Deaf or DeafBlind individuals culturally prefer to be called Deaf or DeafBlind (capitalized) rather than “people with hearing loss,” and so forth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ hearing-impaired person ✘ person who is hearing impaired ✘ person with hearing loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ hard-of-hearing person ✔ person who is hard-of-hearing 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ person with deafness and blindness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ DeafBlind person 	

Description of blind people and people with vision loss

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ person with blindness ✘ visually challenged person ✘ sight-challenged person ✘ visually impaired person ✘ vision-impaired person ✘ person who is visually impaired ✘ person who is vision impaired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ blind person ✔ person who is blind ✔ a person with low vision



Disability status (Continued)

Use of negativistic images or terms that imply restriction, and slurs

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ wheelchair-bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ wheelchair user ✔ person in a wheelchair ✔ person who uses a wheelchair 	Avoid language that uses negativistic images, terms that imply restriction, and slurs that insult or disparage a particular group. As with other diverse groups, insiders in disability communities may use these terms with one another; it is not appropriate for an outsider (someone who doesn't have a disability) to use these terms.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ brain damaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ cripple ✘ invalid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person with a physical disability ✔ person with a disability 	

Sexual orientation and gender diversity

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ homosexual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ lesbian ✔ gay ✔ bisexual ✔ transgender ✔ queer ✔ intersex ✔ asexual ✔ LGBTQ+ ✔ LGBTQIA+ <p><i>("+" stands for other communities not encompassed in the acronym, such as pansexual, two-spirit and more)</i></p>	Be careful with confusing terms that refer to gender identity and ones that refer to sexual orientation. "LGBTQ+" is an umbrella term that includes all sexual orientations outside of heterosexuality and all gender identities outside of cisgender. "Queer" is an umbrella term used colloquially to describe the LGBTQ+ community. It was once a slur but has been reclaimed by many. Only use if mirroring an individual's self-identifying language. It can be used in regard to gender identity or sexual orientation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ lifestyle/preference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ orientation/identity 	The term "lifestyle" or "preference" is an inaccurate and derogatory term that implies that being LGBTQ+ is voluntary or a choice.





Sexual orientation and gender diversity (Continued)

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ birth sex ✘ natal sex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ assigned sex ✔ sex assigned at birth 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ born a girl ✘ born female ✘ born a boy ✘ born male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ assigned female at birth (AFAB) ✔ assigned male at birth (AMAB) 	Many in the trans community still do not like these alternative terms but understand their use in the medical field.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ biological woman ✘ biological man 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ cis ✔ cisgender woman ✔ cisgender man 	“Cisgender” describes a gender identity that aligns with the sex assigned at birth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ hermaphrodite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ intersex 	“Intersex” is the preferred umbrella term for sex that falls outside of the male/female binary.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ transvestite ✘ transsexual ✘ tranny 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ trans ✔ transgender 	“Transgender” is the preferred umbrella term for a gender identity that falls outside of a cisgender experience (gender aligning with the sex assigned at birth). “Tranny” is a slur.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ “a transgender” ✘ “the transgenders” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ a trans person ✔ a transgender individual ✔ a trans woman ✔ a trans man 	Transgender is an adjective.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ sex change ✘ sex reassignment surgery (SRS) ✘ gender reassignment surgery (GRS) ✘ gender confirmation surgery ✘ pre-operative (pre-op) ✘ post-operative (post-op) ✘ non-operative (non-op) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ gender affirming surgery ✔ transition care ✔ gender-affirming care 	These terms are preferred because gender-affirming care and surgeries do not confirm or reassign sex or gender. In New York State, surgery is not required to change an individual’s legal gender marker. Also, not all trans people want or have access to surgery.





Sexual orientation and gender diversity (Continued)

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<p>✘ pregnant and parenting woman</p> <p><i>(unless you know this is how an individual refers to themselves)</i></p>	<p>✔ pregnant and parenting person(s)</p>	<p>If an individual uses a gendered term for themselves, it is appropriate to use that term for them. However, if you do not know the term that an individual or group of people uses, it is best to utilize language that is inclusive of people of all genders.</p>
<p>✘ preferred pronouns</p>	<p>✔ pronouns ✔ personal pronouns</p>	<p>“Preferred pronouns” communicates that pronouns are a preference and that other pronouns are acceptable.</p>
<p>✘ he ✘ she ✘ himself ✘ herself</p> <p><i>(unless you know the pronouns that the individual uses)</i></p>	<p>✔ they ✔ themselves ✔ themselves</p>	<p>You cannot assume someone’s pronouns so it is a best practice to use the gender neutral pronouns (for example, they/them/theirs) until that individual tells you otherwise.</p> <p>Gender-neutral language, including but not limited to “they,” “them” and “theirs” should also be used if you are composing something that will generally apply to everyone. Instead of using a gender specific pronoun, it is possible to substitute a noun or to rewrite the sentence to eliminate the need for a pronoun.</p> <p>For example, “Once the individual submits an application, the agency has 30 days to respond.”</p> <p>In 2023, Governor Hochul signed S155/A1142 (Chapter 139, Laws of 2023), which requires that “hereafter, in any law, rule, regulation, ordinance or resolution, gendered terms shall not be used and gender-neutral terms, including but not limited to “they”, “them” and “theirs”, shall be used in substitution therefor and with the same force and effect…”</p> <p>However, “if such law, rule, regulation, ordinance or resolution is in reference to a specific person, the language referring to such person shall be gendered in accordance with the gender identity of such person.”</p>





Sexual orientation and gender diversity (Continued)

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Mr./Ms./Mrs./Miss ✘ sir/ma'am <p><i>(unless you know the prefix or term that the individual uses)</i></p>	<p>If you do not know the prefix an individual uses or the way they want to be addressed, it is not appropriate to assume. Instead, use the person's name or a greeting that omits a gendered description.</p>	<p>If an individual has indicated that they use a particular gendered prefix, it is appropriate to use that prefix for them.</p> <p>If asking about a prefix (such as on a form), it is best to include a gender-neutral prefix option (like "Mx."), an option to indicate no prefix, and an option to write in a prefix that is not listed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ husband/wife ✘ sister/brother ✘ daughter/son ✘ niece/nephew/uncle/aunt ✘ father/mother <p><i>(unless you know the prefix or term that the individual uses)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ spouse/partner ✔ sibling ✔ child ✔ family member ✔ parent 	<p>If an individual has indicated that they use a gendered term for themselves or their family member, it is appropriate to use the same language that they use.</p> <p>However, if you do not know the term that an individual uses, it is best to use gender-neutral language to avoid making assumptions and be more inclusive.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ ladies and gentlemen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ good afternoon/good morning ✔ hello and welcome ✔ greetings to you all ✔ good ✔ morning/afternoon folks ✔ good morning/afternoon everyone 	<p>When beginning a conversation with a group of people, use greetings that are not gendered. For example, terms such as "ladies and gentlemen" can exclude or misrepresent people. Instead, use the suggested alternatives to create an inclusive, welcoming introduction.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ fireman ✘ congressman ✘ stewardess ✘ policeman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ firefighter ✔ congressperson ✔ flight attendant ✔ police officer 	<p>If an individual has indicated that they use a gendered term for themselves, it is appropriate to use the same language that they use. However, if you do not know the term that an individual uses, it is best to use gender-neutral language to avoid making assumptions and be more inclusive.</p>



Socioeconomic status, racial equity and criminal legal system

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ the poor ✗ low-class people ✗ poor people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ person with low income ✓ person experiencing poverty 	Many people find the terms “low class” and “poor” pejorative. Use person-first language instead. Define income brackets and levels if possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ homeless person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ person without housing ✓ person experiencing homelessness 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ prisoner ✗ convict ✗ inmate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ person who is/has been incarcerated ✓ person living in a correctional facility 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ prostitute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ person who engages in sex work ✓ human trafficking victim (can cover sex workers and individuals who have been forced into other forms of work in exchange for something or through some type of coercion) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ slave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ person who is/was enslaved 	

Substance use and addiction

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ use or misuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ chemical dependence ✗ substance abuse ✗ chemical dependency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ substance use disorder (SUD) ✓ the name of a specific substance followed by “use disorder” such as “cannabis use disorder”



Substance use and addiction (Continued)

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ clean 	<p>For toxicology test results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ negative test results <p>For non-toxicology purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ in recovery or remission ✔ not using substances ✔ not currently or actively using substances
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ dirty 	<p>For toxicology test results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ positive test results <p>For non-toxicology purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ currently or actively using substances
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ contraband 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ items that may create an unsafe environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ relapse ✘ lapse ✘ slip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ recurrence ✔ recurrent substance use ✔ recurrent use ✔ resumed use ✔ return to use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ addict ✘ junkie ✘ substance abuser ✘ user ✘ dope fiend ✘ crackhead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person who uses drugs (PWUD) ✔ person who injects drugs (PWID) ✔ person with a substance use disorder (SUD) (if clinically accurate) ✔ person with active use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ alcoholic ✘ alcoholism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person who uses alcohol ✔ alcohol use disorder (AUD) ✔ person with alcohol use disorder (AUD)



Mental health

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ committed suicide ✘ successful suicide attempt ✘ completed suicide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ died by suicide ✔ death by suicide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ unsuccessful suicide attempt ✘ failed suicide attempt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ survived a suicide attempt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ mentally ill ✘ defective ✘ nuts ✘ crazy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person with a mental health condition ✔ person with a mental health disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ psychiatric terms to describe a person such as “bipolar,” “borderline” or “psychotic” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person with bipolar disorder ✔ person with borderline personality disorder ✔ person with a psychotic disorder

Public health

Term to avoid	Suggested alternative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ spousal abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ intimate partner violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ clean 	<p>For health-related test results (such as sexually transmitted infections [STIs], for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ negative test results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ dirty 	<p>For health-related test results (such as STIs, for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ positive test results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ AIDS victim ✘ HIV-infected person ✘ person infected with HIV ✘ HIV or AIDS patient ✘ to catch AIDS or HIV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ person with AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) ✔ person living with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) ✔ to acquire HIV ✔ to be diagnosed with HIV

