



TIP SHEET

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE: RACE & ETHNICITY

Disclaimer: Language is constantly evolving, and words concerning identity hold specific importance for those that embrace a particular label. We encourage you to listen to and prioritize a person's self-understanding over standard definitions that often sacrifice complexity to be more concise.

BEING INCLUSIVE

Co-creating environments that are respectful and inclusive depends not only on organizational policies and practices but also on our individual beliefs, behaviours and language in our social interactions. Language has power, and some references can have negative impacts on people of different races, cultures, and ethnicities. It is important to use language that is respectful and inclusive while avoiding words or phrases that carry hierarchical valuation or portray racialized persons or groups as “inferior”, “less than,” or “less valued” than others. It is recommended to always prioritize and not assume how a member of a racialized and/or ethnic community prefers to be addressed.

DEFINITIONS


Ancestry: Ancestry refers to family lineage, genealogy, or ethnic origins.

Antisemitism: The systematic discrimination against and oppression of Jewish peoples, Judaism, and Jewish culture and traditions.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC). It is important to recognize that a blanket term like “people of colour” denies differences between members of racialized communities. “People of colour” should not be used to refer to Indigenous peoples as they are considered distinct societies under the Canadian Constitution. Person/people of colour and Black are not synonymous. BIPOC recognizes that while there may be some similarities between the experiences of Black, Indigenous peoples and the experiences of people of colour, there are important differences as well which need to be recognized ([Juric, 2020, para. 14](#)). Some have noted that using the acronym BIPOC can suggest an interchangeability in being Black or a person of colour, thus failing to reflect the process of racialization, and suggest using “racialized” instead ([Daniel, 2020](#)). (Also refer to “Inclusive Language: Indigenous People” for further information.

Culture: Shared norms, values, and behaviours developed consciously and unconsciously within a group of people. Culture can be observed through language, traditions, food, religion, arts, and more.

Code-Switching: Code-switching is when we adjust our style of speech, appearance, behaviour, and expression to suit the expectations, sensibilities, values, and norms of others in a particular setting. Shifting the language we use depending on our audience is the most common form of code-switching. Research shows that racialized people often code-switch among white colleagues and white supervisors. People do this to avoid unfair treatment, poor impressions, and discrimination by dominant groups in the workplace.



Colonialism/Colonization: The policy and practice of a power creating borders, then extending control past those borders over other land and peoples. This usually includes the exploitation, enslavement, and displacement of Indigenous peoples, and the absorption and assimilation of colonized peoples into the culture and systems of the colonial power. Colonialism is often based on the ethnocentric belief that the morals, institutions, and values of the colonizer are superior to those of the colonized.

Colourism/Shadism: Colourism is a common form of discrimination globally where people are conditioned to treat lighter or fairer skin with greater value, desirability, and inclusion. This occurs both within and outside of racial communities.

Bi-racial/multi-racial: Bi-racial refers to a person whose heritage includes members of two racial groups, whereas multi-racial refers to a person whose heritage includes members of multiple racial groups ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.-a](#)).

Cultural Appropriation: Unlike a cultural exchange, which is mutual and respectful, cultural appropriation is when members of a dominant group adopt an aspect of culture from a non-dominant group (dress, practices, ideas, vernacular, etc.) in a way that doesn't respect its original meaning, give credit to the source, and/or reinforces stereotypes. Appropriation often turns the culture of communities experiencing marginalization into a commodity for dominant groups.

Decolonization: An ongoing process that aims to deconstruct colonial-settler ideologies such as white supremacy, give value to Indigenous knowledge, and improve power imbalances. Decolonization is the active work to give back the colonized territory's independence and engage in reconciliation to address the effects of colonialism on social, political, and economic levels.


Diaspora: A diaspora is a large group of people with a similar heritage or homeland who have since moved to places worldwide, usually forcibly or involuntarily. Examples of these communities include the removal of Jewish people from Judea, the removal of Africans through enslavement, and, more recently, Syrian refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War.

Ethnicity: A social group of people who share common culture and distinct historical traditions such as language, race, place of origin, ancestry, physical features, or creed. This is a complex term and a social construct which can be subjective ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.-a](#); [New Canadian Media, 2016](#)).

Ethnocentrism: Judging another culture solely based on the standards and values of one's own culture. Also, a belief in the inherent superiority of one's nation or ethnic group.

Eurocentrism: The practice of conceptualizing the world from a European perspective and with an implied belief, either consciously or subconsciously, in the pre-eminence of European or European-American culture.

Immigrant: An immigrant is a person who has experienced relocating to a different country than where they were born or resided long-term. An immigrant can be of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and beyond generations, which explains what generation of a family initially immigrated to a new country.



Indigenous: This umbrella term encompasses the First Nations, Inuit, or Métis Peoples of Canada and is the preferred term to use in global context. Indigenous peoples are culturally distinct racial/ethnic groups whose members are directly descended from the earliest known inhabitants of a particular geographic region. Indigenous communities are incredibly diverse with varying cultures, histories, ancestral lands, languages, forms of governance, and spiritual traditions.

Islamophobia is defined as fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims (and those perceived as Muslim. It is motivated by “institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism which targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim” (Awan & Zempi, 2020).

Microaggressions: Small, subtle, and often unintentional actions that communicate offensive or harmful attitudes and ideas about groups experiencing marginalization. For example, saying “I don’t see colour” erases people’s unique experiences of race and ethnicity, including instances of bias and discrimination.

TIP: Learn more about microaggressions (including how to avoid, respond and be accountable). Check out the Micropedia of Microaggressions for additional examples across various social characteristics.


Misogynoir: Dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against Black women.

Model Minority Myth: A seemingly positive stereotype associated with Asian communities. The myth perpetuates the idea that Asian people are inherently quiet, hardworking, studious, and rule-abiding and weaponizes this portrayal to stigmatize other racial groups. The myth erases the discrimination that Asian people face and the acute struggles of Southeast Asian refugees, newcomers, Asian people from lower castes, and Pacific Islanders in North America, where immense disparities still exist in income, educational attainment, and workplace representation.

Race: A social construct that categorizes people or groups according to characteristics including physical traits (particularly skin colour), cultural affiliation, cultural history and ethnic origin, even though none of these can legitimately be used to classify groups of people ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.-a](#)). Perceptions of race vary worldwide and cannot be defined genetically, biologically, or anthropologically. Common racial categories in North America include Arab, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, Latinx/Latine, Middle Eastern/North African (MENA), Native, Pacific Islander, Multiracial, and white.

Racialization: A complex process by which groups are constructed as being of a particular “race”, and on that basis, subjected to different and unequal treatment that affects economic, political, and social life ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.-a](#); [Racial Equity Tools, 2020](#)).

Racial equity: A condition that would be achieved if one’s racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. Racial equity is one part of racial justice and thus includes work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This work includes eliminating policies, practices, attitudes, cultural messages and language that reinforce differential outcomes



by race or fail to eliminate them. Inclusive language is one means of achieve racial equity [Racial Equity Tools, 2020](#).

Racism: The system of oppression that marginalizes, oppresses, and makes invisible the lives and experiences of individuals or groups based on their actual or perceived racial identity. Racism can manifest individually (e.g., beliefs and attitudes), institutionally (e.g., policies and practices of organizations), and structurally (e.g. history, culture, society, law, economy, etc.).

Refugees: People who have experienced involuntary or coerced movement from their homeland to a new country in search of safety. This type of displacement can occur due to conflict, persecution, violence, war, and/or human rights violations and beyond.

Reverse Racism: The term “reverse racism” is often used to describe the notion that individuals from non-dominant races and ethnicities can exhibit discriminatory attitudes or behaviours towards members of dominant racial groups. However, the concept of reverse racism is untrue and does not accurately reflect the systemic power dynamics and historical context surrounding racism. Racism, by definition, involves prejudice, discrimination, and the exercise of power and privilege by the dominant group against non-dominant races and ethnicities. It is rooted in social, economic, and political structures that grant advantages and privileges to certain racial groups while systematically oppressing others.

Tokenism: Seeking representation of non-dominant groups without a genuine desire for their participation, input, and individual lived experiences. Some organizations recruit racialized people or people experiencing marginalization as a token to serve an optics-based agenda. This agenda is designed to deflect criticism rather than engage in meaningful organizational change.


White: A term used to refer to people belonging to the majority group in Canada, usually of European origin and not capitalized as done with other racial and ethnic groups. It is recognized that there are people who may identify as “white,” but who may face discrimination because of their identification with other identity-based grounds such as class, gender, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, religion, language or geographic origin ([Bauder, 2020](#); [Canadian Race Relations Foundation, n.d.](#); [Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.-a](#);

White Dominant Workplace Culture: White Dominant Workplace Culture or White Supremacy Workplace Culture refers to the norms and standards that organizations often embrace that make it difficult, if not impossible, to affirm other cultural norms and standards or transform in inclusive and equitable ways. Examples of White Dominant Workplace Culture include: Either/or thinking, power hoarding, paternalism, fear of open conflict, transactional relationships, and more.

TIP: Learn more about white dominant workplace culture.

Check out the resource [White Dominant Workplace Culture and Something Different to learn more.](#)

White Fragility: A state where even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable for white people, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions, such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviours, such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the discussion altogether.



White Privilege: Unearned social advantages experienced by individuals who are white or perceived as white. White privilege can manifest in various ways, including access to resources, opportunities, power, representation, and cultural acceptance. Examples of white privilege include not facing the same levels of surveillance or lethal bias from law enforcement or having greater opportunities to build generational wealth due to histories of colonization, enslavement, red-lining, and more.

Xenophobia: The intense fear, dislike, or prejudice towards people from other countries or cultures. It is characterized by negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviour directed at individuals or groups perceived as foreign or different.

GENERAL TIPS

- Avoid stereotyping and making generalizations based on race, colour, nationality, and ethnicity.
- Avoid references that draw undue attention to a person's race, ethnicity, skin colour etc. If such references are valid or appropriate to use within a specific context, then learn the most appropriate terminology or use the term preferred by the person or group being represented.
- Racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and capitalized. Use "Black" instead of "black" when referring to race and culture. Similarly, capitalize terms such as "Chinese," etc. Do not capitalize "white".
- Black with a capital B is generally acceptable in reference to people of African descent. The terms Black and "African Canadian" are not the same. The term "Black" recognizes the global nature of Blackness in the contemporary world. Some Black people may be descendants of trafficked and enslaved people. Other Black people will be immigrants or descendants of immigrants.
- Dual heritage terms such as "German Canadian" or "Iranian Canadian" can be used if relevant to the context, or if preferred by the individual or group being represented. When used, these descriptions should be capitalized and not hyphenated.
- Never question someone's intelligence or aptitude based on a unique dialect, accent, vernacular (e.g. Black American English), or being a language learner.
- Do not imitate, especially as a joke, the accents and media stereotypes of communities you are not a member of.
- Avoid the use of racial microaggressions, including:
 - * "Where are you really from?"
 - * "I don't see colour." or "We are all one race, the human race."
 - * "That's reverse racism."
 - * "You are a credit to your race."
 - * "I'm not a racist. I have several Black friends."
 - * "They were an affirmative action hire."
 - * "You are so articulate" (with a surprised tone.)




INSTEAD OF, PLEASE USE...

Instead of...	Please use...
Slang or derogatory racial/cultural descriptions	Accurate, respectful terms.
Asian; Oriental/Orientalists	<p>Asian is used to refer to people in Asia, instead use Asian Canadian individuals. To be more specific, refer to the region (Person from South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia) or specific nation of origin.</p> <p>When writing about people of Middle Eastern or North African origin, state the nation (i.e., Iran, Iraq, Egypt, etc.) when possible.</p>
Using the name of the continent (African)	Use the name of the country (Person from Nigeria or Nigerian person)
Blacks	<p>Black people, Black employees.</p> <p>Try not to identify or describe people on the basis of race in tokenizing or reductive ways. Ask yourself if you would mention 'white student' or 'white faculty member' when discussing others.</p>
Blacklist / Whitelist	Allow List / Deny List
Master copy, Master bedroom	Primary Copy, Primary Bedroom
Ghetto, that's so ghetto	Specific neighbourhood name, "That's low quality," "That's outdated."
Slave-owners, slaves	Enslavers, People who enslaved others., Victims of human trafficking, People who were enslaved.
Caucasian	white. "Caucasian" is discouraged because historically it was used as a way of classifying white people as a more favourable race compared with other races. To provide more specificity, refer to the region (e.g., Southern European, Scandinavian) or national origin where possible (e.g. Irish, French, Swedish, etc.)
Coloured people	<p>Coloured people in its original form was language used by white people in power to 'Other' and discriminate against those who were not white. The term has negative historical connotations.</p> <p>Consider using racialized person/ people, racialized community/ communities, BIPOC, or people of colour instead.</p>

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INSTEAD OF, PLEASE USE...

Hispanic or Latino as an all-encompassing term	<p>Hispanic and Latino have different implications. Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine might be preferred by those originating from Latin America.</p> <p>Some use the term Hispanic to refer to people with regard to their relationship to the language of Spanish or the country of Spain... Note that not every group in Latin America speaks Spanish (e.g. Brazil's official language is Portuguese). In general, naming the nation or region of origin is preferred.</p> <p>Latino is gendered ("Latino" is masculine and "Latina" is feminine). Latinx/Latine is increasingly used as a gender-neutral term inclusive of all gender identities.</p>
Indigenous people	Indigenous peoples (recognizing the diversity in language, culture, ancestral lands, and more among Indigenous Nations)
Grandfather clause	Legacy, exempt
Mixed-race people, mulatto	Bi-racial people, multi-racial individuals
Minority	Use the term "racialized person," "racialized people," "racialized community/communities" instead of "minorities." Other terms that can be used include "people of colour," "BIPOC" (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour), "groups experiencing underrepresentation", or "systemically excluded groups." The term "visible minority" is typically used to refer to people who are not white and is increasingly becoming unacceptable to use. Using the term "minority" when referring to a racialized person or group may imply an inferior social position in comparison to the majority.
Ex-patriots	Immigrant
Exotic, urban, inner city	Discuss specific racial group or region
Open the kimono	Full disclosure, provide insight into
Gypsies, "I feel so gyped!"	Roma and Traveller Communities, Romani People, "That's unfair"
white trash	rural, low-income



TIP: Being anti-racist is a lifelong journey that requires consistent effort, self-education, and self-reflection. It is important to stay engaged, listen to the experiences of racialized and ethnic communities, and take action to address systemic racism wherever you encounter it.

Read books, articles, and listen to podcasts or watch documentaries that explore racial issues specific to Canada. [Check out the anti-racist reading list at the Edmonton Public Library.](#)

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