

AUSTRALIANS
TOGETHER

Language and Terminology Guide

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Introduction

IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

How we use language matters. It's important to always remember that we're not just using terms to refer to historical events or abstract groups, we're talking about real people. Listening to a person's preferences when it comes to how they're referred to is an essential part of respecting that person.

COMPLEXITY

There's no rulebook when it comes to using appropriate terminology regarding First Nations people. This is because First Nations people across Australia are diverse; there are many different experiences and opinions regarding appropriate terminology and it's difficult to identify terminology that's acceptable to all groups¹. The following guidelines only generally represent First Nations people's preferences. It's good to ask local groups to advise on the most appropriate terminology for their region.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Terms regarding First Nations people are layered with a history of dominating, discriminating against, misunderstanding and misrepresenting First Nations people and culture². Throughout our colonial history, some of the names used to refer to First Nations people in Australia reflected the common belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were inferior to white people, or even less than human. Consequently, many of these terms have negative connotations and should be replaced with words that are more respectful and less hurtful towards First Nations people. It's important to be sensitive to the meanings and historic context of certain words. This also applies to language used to refer to non-Indigenous Australians.

LIVING DOCUMENT

Appropriate terminology is continually changing as more voices are listened to, and enter into, a national conversation regarding First Nations matters. We need to continually listen to First Nations people and adopt preferred terminology as the conversations evolve³.

¹Queensland Studies Authority, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Handbook 2010*, https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior/snr_ati_10_handbook.pdf

²Queensland Studies Authority, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Handbook 2010*, https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior/snr_ati_10_handbook.pdf

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Introduction

PROCESS

Australians Together developed these guidelines through a process of listening to First Nations people and non-Indigenous people and learning from existing work. We recognised that language is a concern for both all people. It can be painful and time-consuming for First Nations people to repeatedly explain why certain language is hurtful. Meanwhile, non-Indigenous Australians are often confused by terminology and can be afraid of joining conversations for fear of unintentionally using offensive or inappropriate language.

With this in mind, we began to research existing guidelines produced by a range of government departments, educational institutions and non-government organisations. We used this as a starting point to develop our own guidelines. We then undertook paid consultations with First Nations Elders and leaders from South Australia, Victoria, Australian Capital Territory and Queensland, who reviewed the guidelines and gave recommendations.

While it's not possible to achieve consensus on all terms, we've sought to respectfully acknowledge the various points of view expressed throughout the consultation process. We continue to invite feedback so these guidelines can evolve. Contact contact@australianstogether.org.au

SECTION 1

Specific Australians Together language

Our challenge

Talking about ‘the problem’ may imply that First Nations people are the problem, or that non-Indigenous people can ‘fix’ the problem.

Australians Together does (technically) exist to address a problem, but the language we use is of great importance, and is highly sensitive. For instance, even mentioning the word ‘problem’ can make people feel uncomfortable because of the way this term has been applied to First Nations people in the past. We acknowledge this point of view and prefer to use the term ‘our challenge’ as we seek to promote a message of mutual responsibility, capacity and reciprocity.

As an organisation we avoid perpetuating the ‘deficit discourse’ regarding First Nations people. That is, discussions regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (in the media, research, politics, health and education) overwhelmingly represent First Nations identity in a narrative of negativity, deficiency and disempowerment.

Using the term ‘problem’ reinforces this deficit discourse. Australians Together rejects this dominant discourse, instead seeking to engage in a more positive, creative and honest conversation about our nation, without denying or trivialising the real and complex impacts of colonisation on First Nations people.

We’ve discerned a challenge stemming from a lack of understanding, value and respect between First Nations people and non-Indigenous Australians, resulting in injustice and disadvantage for many First Nations people. This challenge is shared by many people.

Our challenge

GUIDELINE

- Don't use the word problem in relation to First Nations injustice or the lack of relationship and connection between First Nations people and non-Indigenous people.
- Don't refer to an 'Indigenous or First Nations problem'.
- Don't state or imply that First Nations people are the problem.
- Don't state or imply that non-Indigenous Australians are going to 'fix' the problem.

EXAMPLES - We don't use the word problem

- x** = Together, we can fix the Indigenous problem.
- x** = First Nations communities in Australia are a problem.
- x** = Non-Indigenous Australians need to listen and learn in order to fix the problems facing First Nations people.

ALTERNATIVES - Instead of 'What's the problem?'

- ✓ = What's wrong?
- ✓ = What's the shared issue?
- ✓ = What's a challenge faced by people living in Australia?

SECTION 2

Preferred options for terminology

First Nations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

In much of our content we use First Nations people when referring to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise it's appropriate to use different words in different situations, but for ease of communication we've chosen 'First Nations people' using a term that's succinct. This language has evolved over time. We previously used 'Indigenous people', but acknowledge that the word 'Indigenous' can be contentious and some First Nations people prefer other terms. Where possible, it's best to adopt the preferred terminology of First Nations people living in your local context.

We acknowledge the diversity among First Nations people living in Australia. Therefore, we avoid phrases such as 'all First Nations people'. Instead we prefer to say to 'many' or 'some' First Nations people.

For many of our audiences, in particular the education sector, the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' is preferred. This aligns with ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority), Narragunnawali and language used in the Australian Curriculum; for example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.

When using 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' it's appropriate to refer to 'non Indigenous people (or Australians)' as a comparison.

First Nations People refers to a distinct People group or nation; for example, Kurna People are Traditional Custodians of what's now know as the Adelaide Plains. First Nations Peoples' refers to multiple People groups.. Other acceptable terms are:

- 'Aboriginal Peoples' or 'Torres Strait Islander Peoples' when referring to the entirety of either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities
- 'Aboriginal person/people' and 'Torres Strait Islander person/people' when referring to one or several members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. ⁴

When referring to First Nations spirituality, knowledges and sites, etc., we've previously used the word 'Indigenous', and this still may be appropriate language. In education resources, we now use 'First Nations' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in this context.

Resources created to support the Australian Curriculum need to use language that's consistent with that used in the Australian Curriculum.

⁴ACARA, *Guiding principles for promoting and implementing the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority*, 2017, <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/media/1536/guiding-principles.pdf>

First Nations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

GUIDELINE

- Use 'First Nations people' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.
- Don't use the word 'Indigenous' when referring to people; use First Nations people or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Always capitalise the words 'First Nations', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'; and 'Indigenous' when referring to non-Indigenous people.
- Avoid blanket phrases such as 'all First Nations people', or 'First Nations people believe that...'
- Don't abbreviate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to ATSI or A&TSI.

EXAMPLE

- x** = All First Nations people experience disadvantage.
- ✓** = Many First Nations people living in Australia experience disadvantage.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation refers to the restoration of an existing relationship. Because we believe that a healthy relationship between First Nations people and non-Indigenous people wasn't generally established in the first place, we prefer to speak in terms of conciliation.

However, when producing curriculum resources, the term 'reconciliation' is used to be consistent with the Content Descriptions and Elaborations within the Australian Curriculum.

GUIDELINE

- Consider carefully before applying the word 'reconciliation' to our organisation.
- Only capitalise 'reconciliation' when it's used as proper noun e.g. National Reconciliation Week, Reconciliation Australia.

EXAMPLE

x = We're all about reconciliation between First Nations people and non-Indigenous Australians.

✓ = Reconciliation efforts in Australia are important.

Empower/ment

'Empowerment' means to give someone power and authority, particularly with regard to control of their own life. However, in some contexts the word 'empowerment' can actually be disempowering if it's understood to mean the giving of power by the powerful to the powerless. When understood this way, the word 'empowerment' can actually reinforce power inequalities.

GUIDELINE

- Avoid using the words 'empower' and 'empowerment'.
- Preferred language includes phrases like 'walk alongside', 'work together', etc.

EXAMPLE

x = Non-Indigenous Australians need to empower First Nations people to improve their own futures.

✓ = First Nations people communities are empowering themselves to overcome challenges.

✓ = Non-Indigenous Australians can walk alongside First Nations people to achieve a better shared future.

Help

Like the word 'empowerment', when used in some contexts, the word 'help' can reinforce power inequalities. This is because 'help' can imply that one party has greater resources and capacity than the other party, or knows best. Even when used with good intentions, the word 'help' can be condescending, paternalistic and disempowering in some contexts.

GUIDELINE

- Don't say that Australians Together 'helps' First Nations people.
- Don't say that non-Indigenous Australians need to 'help' First Nations people.
- 'Help' can be used if it's being applied to both First Nations people and non-Indigenous people.
- 'Help' can be used if it's applied mutually, i.e. 'help each other'.

EXAMPLE

x = We exist to help First Nations people living in Australia.

x = It's important to help First Nations people overcome poverty.

✓ = Respectful relationships between First Nations people and non-Indigenous people can help ensure a better future for all.

Country

The term 'Country' is often used to describe a culturally defined area of land associated with a particular, culturally distinct group of people, clan or nation. Country can also refer to more than a physical place – it indicates cultural relationships and responsibilities associated with caring for land.

GUIDELINE

- Use 'Country' to refer to a particular, culturally defined area of land.
- Always capitalise Country.

EXAMPLE

x = Adelaide is located on Kurna country.

✓ = Adelaide is located on Kurna Country.

Nation

The word 'nation' can be used to refer to a culturally distinct group of First Nations people. It's important to note that nation is a modern term. The word nation as it's commonly used and understood today doesn't necessarily represent how First Nations Peoples would have thought of themselves prior to colonisation. However, nation is generally accepted by First Nations people as a useful word to describe culturally distinct First Nations groups. Other potential appropriate terms include language groups, tribes and people groups. Family groups, kinship groups and clans usually refer to sub-groups within a nation.

GUIDELINE

- Use 'nation' to refer to a culturally distinct First Nations group of people.
- Always capitalise the name of the nation, but don't capitalise the word 'nation'.

EXAMPLE

- x** = Karlie's a member of the Ngunnawal group.
- ✓** = Karlie's a member of the Ngunnawal nation.

Mob

'Mob' is a term identifying a group of First Nations people associated with a particular place or Country. 'Mob' is generally used by First Nations people to identify themselves (e.g. 'my mob') or refer to a language group (e.g. 'the Wiradjuri mob'). It can be invasive for non-Indigenous people to take and use the word 'mob' unless invited to by First Nations people. It's recommended to ask permission before using this term.

GUIDELINE

- At a corporate level, we've chosen not to use the term 'mob'.
- It might be acceptable to use the term 'mob' verbally in-house when referring to people/communities we have relationships with (verbal communication only).

EXAMPLE

- x** = You should get in touch with the Wurundjeri mob around Melbourne.
- ✓** = You should get in touch with The Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council in Melbourne.

Area-specific names

Terms such as Goori, Koori, Murri, Noongar are names used by First Nations people in specific areas when referring to themselves. These names are derived from local First Nations languages. It can be invasive for non-Indigenous people to take and use these terms unless invited to by First Nations people. It's recommended to ask permission before using these terms.

Language is area-specific, so if you pick up terms from one area, don't assume that the same terms apply to another area. Certain words have different meanings in different First Nations languages, and a word from one language in one part of the continent may mean something different in another community. Consequently, navigating appropriate language can be challenging even for First Nations people. Being aware of the challenges this entails can help avoid awkward situations.

GUIDELINE

- We've chosen not to use area-specific names at a corporate level.
- Please note that area-specific names aren't the same as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nation names. We encourage the use of nation names.

EXAMPLE

x = There are many Murri players in the NRL.

✓ = Many First Nations NRL players have connections to Queensland and north-west New South Wales.

Blackfella/whitefella

Many First Nations people use the term 'blackfella' to refer to themselves. The term 'black' has both positive and negative connotations. It can signify unity and political activism; however, it has also been used to devalue and discriminate against people on the basis of their skin colour. It can be invasive for non-Indigenous people to take and use these terms unless invited to by First Nations people. It's recommended that non-Indigenous people don't use these terms.

GUIDELINE

- We don't use the words 'blackfella' and 'whitefella' at a corporate level.
- Individual team members may use these terms in verbal communication where they have longstanding relationships with the community/person they're speaking with, and know it to be acceptable and appropriate.

EXAMPLE

- x** = More blackfellas live in this community than whitefellas.
- ✓ = There are more First Nations people living in this community than non-Indigenous people.

Culture

Misunderstandings about First Nations cultures can reinforce harmful stereotypes and misperceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It's important that the language we use to speak about First Nations cultures doesn't perpetuate these myths and misperceptions. Here are some things to be aware of when speaking or writing about First Nations cultures.

'LOST' VERSUS 'STOLEN'

It's often said that First Nations cultures have been 'lost' due to colonisation. In this context, the word 'lost' is a euphemism which obscures the harsh reality that colonising policies and practices actually devastated many elements of First Nations cultures, often intentionally. The word 'lost' erases the role of the colonisers in the destruction of culture, at worst implying that First Nations people are responsible for the disintegration of their cultures. In the context of cultural breakdown, the word 'stolen' is less appropriate than 'devastated' because it implies colonisers took First Nations culture for themselves, when the reality is that colonisers rejected, suppressed and even eradicated culture in many places. It's also important to acknowledge that, despite the impact of colonisation, First Nations cultures are never lost or completely destroyed but always ready to be rediscovered and revived.

In reference to colonial acquisition of land, the removal of children and taking of wages owed to First Nations people, the word 'stolen' is more appropriate than 'lost'. In these contexts, colonisers did in fact take and keep land, children and wages. However, be aware that using the word 'stolen' can elicit a strong, defensive or even aggressive response from some people.

Culture

GUIDELINE

- Where colonisation has disintegrated culture, avoid using the term 'lost'. Instead use words like '(partially) destroyed'.
- When referring to children removed from their families under assimilation policies, the word 'stolen' or 'removed' should be used rather than 'lost'.
- When referring to colonial occupation of First Nations lands, use the words 'taken' or 'stolen' and avoid the word 'lost'.
- Use the term 'stolen wages' to refer to income denied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees during the assimilation era.

EXAMPLE

- x** = First Nations cultures have been lost.
- x** = Many First Nations Peoples have lost their traditional lands as a result of colonisation.
- x** = Many First Nations families lost children as a result of assimilation policies.
- ✓ = Colonisation devastated many elements of First Nations cultures.
- ✓ = Melbourne is built on land taken from Wurundjeri and Bunurong People.
- ✓ = Children removed from their families under the government's assimilation policies are known as the Stolen Generations.

Culture

'EXTINCT' VERSUS 'ALIVE'

It's a common myth that colonisation extinguished First Nations cultures, particularly in high density/urban areas such as the east coast of Australia. This misunderstanding disregards First Nations people's efforts to sustain their cultures, and implies that expressions of culture today are less authentic than pre-colonisation.

Despite the challenges presented by colonisation, First Nations people have fought to protect and practise their cultures, and to integrate and adapt them to new experiences in ways that are culturally appropriate and acceptable. As such, First Nations cultures remain strong, relevant and present for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people⁵. It's important that our language reflects the dynamic, living and evolving nature of First Nations cultures.

GUIDELINE

- Avoid speaking of culture in the past tense.
- Don't imply that culture is more or less authentic depending on whether it's more 'traditional', or takes place in an urban or remote setting.
- Situate any discussion about culture in the context of colonisation and how it's affected cultural practice.

EXAMPLE

- ✘ = Urban First Nations people have lost their culture.
- ✓ = First Nations cultures across the nation are rich and diverse.

⁵http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/webdocuments/social-economic-development/community-development/the_urban_indigenous_community_research_paper.pdf

Urban/remote

The implication that 'urban' First Nations people and cultures are 'less Indigenous' than 'remote' people and cultures is offensive. The idea that 'real' Aboriginal people live in Arnhem Land or the Central desert, and that only 'remote' Aboriginal people and cultures are 'really Aboriginal' is highly problematic and offensive.

GUIDELINE

- Only use terms such as 'remote' to refer to geographical location and access to services.

EXAMPLE

x = Remote First Nations people retain much traditional knowledge.

✓ = Access to goods and services in remote First Nations communities is limited.

Traditional

The word 'traditional' to refer to cultural practices prior to colonisation can imply that modern cultural practices are less authentic, undermining and devaluing modern and particularly urban expressions of First Nations cultures.

GUIDELINE

- Care should be taken with the word 'traditional', preferable alternatives include 'ancestral practices' and 'pre-colonisation way of life'.
- Don't use the term 'traditional' to refer to people, particularly in contrast to 'urban' people.

EXAMPLE

x = There are more traditional First Nations people living in Arnhem Land than in Redfern.

✓ = While some aspects of First Nations cultures more closely resemble pre-colonisation ways of life than other aspects, all of these cultural expressions are valid and represent the dynamic nature of culture.

Dreaming/Dreamtime

The terms 'Dreaming' and 'Dreamtime' have broadly come to refer to complex Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being or "an all-embracing (Indigenous) concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment."⁶ The words 'Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming' have never been a direct translation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander word as the English language doesn't have an equivalent to express the complex concepts. The universal translation of the unique terms that exist within First Nations languages into the single term is problematic. The terms 'Dreaming' and 'Dreamtime' carry significant historical colonial baggage and erase the complexities of the original concepts and the diversity across the many different First Nations languages and cultures. The term 'Dreamtime' is particularly problematic, as it promotes the misunderstanding that Dreaming is something that occurred at the so-called, 'dawn of time'. In fact, it embraces time past, present and future.

'Dreaming' is often used when broadly referring to the spirituality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across the nation. Where appropriate, follow the term 'Dreaming' with an explanation of why the term is insufficient.

First Nations Creation stories are a type of Dreaming story. In the context of curriculum resources, the term 'Creation' is used from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspective; not a biblical perspective. We acknowledge that other worldviews or faiths may define this term differently.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages contain many words for spirituality and beliefs, such as:

- *tjurkurrpa* (Pitjantjatjara People, north-western South Australia)
- *altjeringa* (Arrernte People, central Australia)
- *ungud* (Ngarinyin People, northern Western Australia)
- *wongar* (north-eastern Arnhem Land)
- *bugari* (Broome, northern Western Australia).⁷

⁶<http://theconversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833>

⁷Creative Spirits, "What is the Dreamtime or the Dreaming?", accessed from: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/spirituality/what-is-the-dreamtime-or-the-dreaming#ixzz4csW9lBY9>

Dreaming/Dreamtime

GUIDELINE

- Don't use the term 'Dreamtime'.
- Where possible use the original terminology from the relevant First Nations languages, but in other circumstances use the term 'Dreaming'.
- Always capitalise 'Dreaming'.
- Always capitalise 'Creation'.
- Don't use words such as 'myth' or 'legend' that give the impression that information and beliefs surrounding Dreaming are untrue.

EXAMPLE

- ✘ = Every aspect of Pitjantjatjara life reflects the Dreamtime.
- ✓ = Every aspect of Pitjantjatjara life reflects the Tjukurrpa.
- ✓ = Dreaming impacts every aspect of life. (The word Dreaming is an approximation of complex Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being).
- ✓ = First Nations spirituality encompasses Dreaming stories, law, lore and Country.

Invasion/discovery/settlement/colonisation

The word 'settlement' wrongly implies that Australia was settled peacefully. It ignores the reality of First Nations People's lands being stolen from them on the basis of the legal fiction of terra nullius. It also denies resistance from First Nations Peoples. Many non-Indigenous Australians prefer the term 'settlers' as it depicts colonisers in a more positive light; however, using this term perpetuates the myth that European occupation of this continent was peaceful. It's worth noting that words like 'invasion' can be divisive and prompt a strong defensive or aggressive response from non-Indigenous Australians.

The words 'settlement' and 'settlers' are used in the Australian Curriculum. When writing text related to this it's appropriate to match the terminology to the Australian Curriculum. This provides an opportunity to explain that settlement wasn't a peaceful process that happened without resistance from First Nations Peoples.

GUIDELINE

- Where possible avoid the words 'settlement' and 'settlers'.
- Use 'colonisation' and 'colonisers' or 'occupation' and 'occupiers'.
- Don't say that Australia was 'discovered' by Europeans.

EXAMPLE

x = Captain Cook discovered Australia.

✓ = Captain Cook was the first Englishman to map the east coast of 'New Holland'.

x = Australia was settled in 1788.

✓ = In 1788 Britain colonised the land now known as Australia.

SECTION 3

Using names and titles

Traditional Owner/Custodian

It's common to hear the term 'Traditional Owner' used to refer to a First Nations person who's directly descended from original Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander occupants of a culturally defined area, and is culturally connected to their Country.⁸ Some people prefer the term 'Custodian' over 'Owner', as it's more reflective of the role of First Nations people in caring for the land rather than 'owning' it in the Western sense.⁹

It's important to acknowledge that this can be a sensitive topic, as gaining or being denied recognition as a Traditional Owner/Custodian can cause tension within and between First Nations people, groups and families.

The term Traditional Owner seeks to fit First Nations systems (of landcare, kinship and governance) into a framework that's more easily recognised and understood by non-Indigenous people, i.e. land ownership.

While these terms are widely used, understood and accepted, a preferable alternative is to replace the word 'Traditional' with the name of the relevant specific people group, such as 'Wurundjeri Custodian'.

GUIDELINE

- Only use Traditional Owner/Custodian to refer to someone who you know is directly descended from original inhabitants of their Country and is recognised by that community.
- Always capitalise Traditional Owner(s)/Custodian(s).
- Where possible, use the name of the specific relevant people group in place of Traditional.
- Where possible, use the term 'Custodian' rather than 'Owner'.

EXAMPLE

x = For significant events in Adelaide, you should engage the services of a traditional owner to conduct a Welcome to Country.

✓ = For significant events in Adelaide, you should engage the services of a Kurna Custodian to conduct a Welcome to Country.

⁸Indigenous people who have been displaced from their traditional lands by colonisation and have lived on the traditional lands of other groups for many decades are sometimes referred to as 'historic people'. Some of these people have been adopted into traditional families and are prominent leaders within communities. Although historic people might feel a connection to the land they live on, they don't carry the traditional stories and knowledge of that land.

⁹ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Protocol Guidelines

Elder

A First Nations Elder is someone recognised within their community as a custodian of cultural knowledge and law. A recognised First Nations community leader could also gain Elder status within their community. In some instances, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people above a certain age will refer to themselves as Elders. However, age isn't a prerequisite, and doesn't automatically make someone an Elder. The important thing is that the community recognises the individual as an Elder.

GUIDELINE

- Make sure you're certain someone is an Elder before referring to them as such. The best way to find out is to ask that person politely, or learn from members of the Elder's First Nations community.
- Always capitalise Elder.

Uncle and Aunty

Some First Nations Elders are given the title Uncle or Aunty. This title is generally bestowed on someone by their community. Some Elders may choose to use the title publicly; others might reserve the title for those they have a personal connection with. It's best practice to ask an Elder if they wish to be referred to as Uncle or Aunty before adopting these titles.

GUIDELINE

- Always ask someone if they'd like to be referred to as Uncle or Aunty. Consider whether use of the title might change depending on the context – face-to-face conversations, formal introductions, references in web resources, etc.
- If you hear a First Nations person refer to someone as an Uncle or Aunty, don't automatically assume you should also use the title.
- Always capitalise Uncle and Aunty.
- Always spell Aunty with a 'y', not an 'ie'.

EXAMPLE

x = Auntie Janet is an elder in Melbourne.

✓ = Aunty Janet is an Elder within the Wurundjeri community.

The best way to find out if someone is a Traditional Custodian, an Elder, Uncle or Aunty is to ask politely.

Names

Some First Nations people have several names, including Western-sounding names, skin names, 'bush' names and more.

GUIDELINE

- If you don't have a relationship with the person, use their full name.
- Ask the person what their preferred name is if you know that it's culturally appropriate to ask that question.

SECTION 4

**Words and phrases
not to use**

ATSI, Aborigine, Aboriginals, natives

Throughout our colonial history, many names have been used to refer to First Nations people. Many of these terms have developed negative connotations and are considered offensive by some First Nations people. Even when used without malicious intent, these words can be harmful. It's important to be sensitive to the meanings and historic context of certain words and avoid those that could cause offence.

GUIDELINE

- Use 'First Nations people' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the first instance. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander can also be used; however, First Nations is now the preferred language we use.
- Don't use the word 'Indigenous' in relation to First Nations people of this land we now call Australia.
- Don't abbreviate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to ATSI or A&TSI.
- Don't refer to First Nations people as Aborigines, Aboriginals or natives.
- You can use the word Aboriginal as an adjective, but don't use it as a noun.
- Don't preface 'Aboriginal' or 'First Nations' with 'the' ('the' can objectify people and often results in generalised and non-specific comments).

EXAMPLE

- x** = Australian Aborigines are a diverse group of people.
- x** = Many Aboriginals live in and around Melbourne.
- x** = A report about ATSI health was released today.
- x** = It's important to listen to the Indigenous people in Australia.
- ✓ = There's much diversity among First Nations people.
- ✓ = First Nations cultures differ from place to place.
- ✓ = A report about the health of First Nations people was released today.
- ✓ = It's important to listen to First Nations people in Australia.

Them/those people/you people

Referring to First Nations people and non-Indigenous people as 'us' and 'them' can be divisive. It can create a split mentality and impede efforts to create a sense of unity/togetherness/solidarity. Using the term 'them' or 'they' to refer to each other can also objectify the people you're referring to and lends itself to generalised statements.

GUIDELINE

- Avoid 'us' and 'them' language, regardless of whether the 'us' refers to First Nations people or non-Indigenous people.
- Never refer to First Nations people as 'they', 'them', 'those people' or 'you people' as it's divisive and objectifying.

EXAMPLE

x = It's important to involve them in policy making decisions.

✓ = It's important to involve members of First Nations communities in policy making decisions.

x = We're inviting those people to attend the meeting.

✓ = We're inviting members of First Nations communities to attend the meeting.

x = if you people need...

✓ = If members of your community need...

Part-Aboriginal, mixed blood, full-blood, half-caste, quarter-caste

Referring to someone as part/half/a percentage Aboriginal can be offensive. For many First Nations people, being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is about more than just a bloodline – it's about that person's entire sense of self and the way they understand and experience the world. For many First Nations people, culture and connection to Country is so fundamental to identity that to imply it's just 'part' of that person's identity undermines its significance. It's important to respect how people choose to define themselves.

GUIDELINE

- Never quantify the degree to which a person identifies as First Nations based on their bloodline or skin colour.
- Where possible, specify what nation a person identifies with.

EXAMPLE

- x** = She's part-Indigenous.
- x** = He's a full-blood Ngarrindjeri man.
- ✓ = Karlie identifies as a First Nations person.
- ✓ = Ron's a Ngarrindjeri man.

Racism/racist

The words 'racism' and 'racist' can be inflammatory, provoking a strong reaction from audiences and deterring people from engaging with content. Subsequently, we avoid these words in initial communication with our audience. However, we're open to sharing third-party content that uses the words 'racism' and 'racist', and we use these words ourselves in more advanced pieces of communication where our audience has chosen to engage with our content at a deeper level.

GUIDELINE

- Avoid the words 'racism' and 'racist' in top-level communication (where audiences are first introduced to and engage with Australians Together and our content).
- Don't edit out the words 'racism' or 'racist' from third-party content we wish to share with our audience.
- Only use the words 'racism' and 'racist' in advanced communications (where our audience has prior experience engaging with us/our content).

White guilt

Many non-Indigenous people become defensive when they hear about past and present injustices experienced by First Nations people. There's a tendency for non-Indigenous people to feel they're being held responsible for things that happened in the past or things they have no control over. Others might not feel defensive, although they could feel guilty when they learn about First Nations disadvantage and injustice.

GUIDELINE

- Avoid language that places blame or elicits guilt.
- Never imply that someone's responsible for things that happened in the past; instead, talk about how our words and actions in the present can contribute to a better future.

EXAMPLE

- x** = It's vital that non-Indigenous Australians make amends for our past.
- ✓** = None of us is responsible for what happened in our nation's past, but we can all be part of creating a better future together.

'We're all Australian'

It's true that we're all Australian, but we need to acknowledge that we come from different backgrounds. And while some First Nations people might feel comfortable being called Australian, others feel it's an imposed term which denies their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity. For example, a member of the Ngunnawal nation might feel that being called 'Australian' ignores and even erases their identity as a Ngunnawal person.

GUIDELINE

- Always acknowledge diversity, both among First Nations people and the non-Indigenous Australian community.
- It's ok to talk about bringing Australians together, but don't imply that togetherness means sameness.
- Avoid phrases like "We're all Australian".

Note: we use the term 'Australian' as an overarching descriptor of those who live in, and are citizens of, the nation called Australia. We don't intend to offend anyone by our use of the term 'Australian/s', but rather to use a term that's consistent and succinct for ease of communication. We acknowledge that some people are uncomfortable identifying as 'Australian' and prefer to be referred to by their distinct cultural identity; for example, their clan or nation.

EXAMPLE

- x** = Regardless of whether you're First Nations or non-Indigenous, we're all Australian.
- √** = Although we might have different cultures and beliefs, we all live on this land called Australia.

SECTION 5

Use of statistics

Use of statistics

Statistics can be an effective way to communicate the big picture or the severity of an issue. They also risk dehumanising issues by reducing actual people to facts and figures. Careful consideration should be given to how we use and present statistical data.

GUIDELINE

- When using statistics, always seek to accompany with a story, face or quote to humanise the data.
- Don't substitute people with numbers.

EXAMPLE

x = The population declined from 150 to just 20.

√ = The population declined from 150 people to just 20 people.

x = In First Nations communities, 1 in 5 live below the poverty line.

√ = In First Nations communities, 1 in 5 people live below the poverty line.

√ = It's estimated that \$500 million is owed to First Nations people in Queensland, people like Iris who worked as a domestic helper for years and received just a fraction of the earnings due to her.

At a glance

WORDS AND PHRASES WE ENCOURAGE

Challenge	Problem
First Nations people Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people Aboriginal people Torres Strait Islander people	Aborigines Aboriginals Natives ATSI / A&TSI
Conciliation Coming together	Reconciliation
Walk alongside	Empowerment
Help all people who call Australia home	Help First Nations people
Country	-
Nation	-
-	Mob* See guidelines
-	Area-specific names (Goori, Murri, Noongar etc.)
-	Blackfella/Whitefella
-	Lost (culture and land) * See guidelines
Removed (people) Stolen (land)	-

WORDS AND PHRASES WE DISCOURAGE

WORDS AND PHRASES WE ENCOURAGE

Cultures are alive and evolving	Culture is extinct
Pre-colonisation way of life	Traditional (culture and people)
-	Urban/Remote* See guidelines
Complex First Nations ways of knowing and being Dreaming	Dreamtime
Invasion Colonisation Occupation	Discovery (of Australia) Settlement
Traditional Custodian Traditional Owner	-
Elder Aunty Uncle	-
-	Them Those people
-	Part Aboriginal Mixed blood Half caste Full blood
-	We're all Australian
-	Racism/Racist* See guidelines

WORDS AND PHRASES WE DISCOURAGE

Consultants

VERSION 1.4 DECEMBER 2021 - MINOR UPDATE

This version has been updated to reflect a change in our language and terminology. We now also use 'First Nations people' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

See pp. 8–9 for further details.

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