Communications Guidelines[1]

Our goal at the Emergency Medical Services for Children Innovation and Improvement Center (EIIC) is to achieve communication that is inclusive of various identities and view-points. Below are some best practices for writing or communicating about different groups of people and making documents accessible. These guidelines can be applied to all EIIC products, including e-mails, documents, website pages, and other projects. As you create these various communications, consider your audience, and choose which of these best practices would best serve them. For additional information on best practices for writing about the pediatric population, check out the American Academy of Pediatrics' "Words Matter" guidance document.

1. **Plain Language**
   Plain language is a style of writing that enables the reader to understand, find, and use the information that is intended to be communicated quickly and easily. Communications written in this style are free of jargon and use simple sentence structures and vocabulary. Using plain language is important because it helps audience members with varied educational backgrounds understand and use your materials. When creating a document that uses plain language, there are five important areas to consider:

   - Audience – Who is your audience? What terms and scenarios are they likely to understand? What do they know? What do you want them to know when they're done interacting with your materials?

   - Structure – What are common structures for this type of material? What structures are my audience familiar with? Is the sequencing of information logical and easy to follow and digest?

   - Design – What font and font size will enable my audience to use this product most efficiently? What headings are needed to help readers navigate this document? What visual aids would be most helpful and where should they be placed? What spacing and contrast will be helpful for navigation?

   - Expression – What writing tone is best for my audience? How can I express an idea or concept without using jargon? What is the simplest and easiest way I can convey this idea? Am I using the active voice as much as possible? Are my sentences short and easy to understand?

   - Evaluation – Have the end materials been vetted by a diverse audience? Have the wording and materials been reviewed by the

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[1] This is a living document whose guidelines will change as new best practices emerge. All iterations of the document will have the date at which it was published.

target audience (s) to ensure that nothing is offensive and will be received positively by all individuals, regardless of their identity and perspectives? Do outside reviewers indicate that they understand the message that was intended to be conveyed?

Additional sources on plain language:
1. PlainLanguage.Gov
2. What is Plain Language?
3. Plain Language - Wikipedia
4. Center for Plain Language
5. Plain Language Materials & Resources - CDC
6. Every Day Words for Public Health Communication - CDC

2. Person-First Language

Person-first language emphasizes the personhood of the individual first and lists any other descriptive characteristics, abilities, or disabilities later. Examples of person first language include:

- Children with asthma
- People with diabetes
- Youth with disabilities

Generally, using person-first language is considered the best way to write about a group of people. Person-first language puts the emphasis on the person who has a characteristic or condition, rather than defining the person by their characteristic or condition. If input can be sought from individuals from the community on how they refer to themselves, you can use those titles or descriptors in place of or in addition to person-first language.

Additional sources on person-first language:
1. Office of Disability Rights: People First Language
2. It Is Perfectly Okay To Call a Disabled Person 'Disabled,' and Here's Why
3. AHCJ: Identity First vs. Person First Language is An Important Distinction
4. TCDD: People First Language

The next few sections provide guidelines for writing about gender, race and ethnicity, and disability. People are referred to in different ways, and it is important to try to avoid unintended bias or offending anyone by keeping the following best practices in mind:

3. Gender

- Use gender neutral/gender inclusive language when possible.
- If gender is not relevant to the topic, do not include it.
- Using the correct pronouns is an easy way to build trust with the people you work with or write about. While most of us are used to

assuming the pronouns of the people around us based on their appearance, there are times where a person's outward appearance and the pronouns that they use may not align with your perception of them. Asking the people you are working with or writing about for their pronouns is the easiest way to ensure that you are not misgendering someone or using pronouns that do not align with their identity. An easy way to ask for pronouns is to provide your preferred pronouns when you introduce yourself. This will usually prompt the person you are interviewing to provide theirs back to you in their introduction. Common pronouns are she/her/hers and he/him/his, and they/them/theirs, but you may also encounter additional pronouns that are less common.

Resources
1. A Guide to How Gender Neutral Language is Developing Around the World
2. UWM LGBTQ+ Resource Center – Gender Pronouns
3. What and Why – MyPronouns.Org
4. WMU Writing Style Guide: Avoid Gender Bias In Writing
5. Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Gender Bias and Sexism in Language
6. Yale: Avoiding Gender Bias in Reference Writing
7. UN: Guidelines for Gendering Inclusive Language In English
8. Writing Center UNC: Gender Inclusive Language

4. Race and Ethnicity
- If race and ethnicity are not relevant to the topic, do not include them.
- If you are writing about a group of people, it is important to be as specific as you can. If you are writing about Korean Americans, it is important that you do not conflate that group with the much larger group of Asian Americans. Also, consider not using the word minority; it is often overused, and it is not specific. Also the status of a given community can change quite quickly, and they may no longer be a minority.
- Think carefully about the words you choose to describe the people you are writing about. Try not to play into stereotypes about certain groups of people through your word choices. Become aware of words that have an additional, coded meaning for various groups of people. Coded meanings go beyond the original definition for a particular word, and the added definition generally assigns negative characteristics to a group of people or area.

- Many common idioms, colloquialisms, metaphors, and slang in the English language have racist origins or coded meanings. Doing some research can help keep you from being perceived as ignorant or offensive.
- Below are a few grammatical rules to consider when writing about communities of color:
  - Capitalize racial and ethnic groups.
  - When using a racial or ethnic group as a noun, do not hyphenate the term.
  - When using a racial or ethnic group as an adjective, use a hyphen.

Sources:
1. NEA Ed Justice: Coded Language
2. Hamilton College: Writing About Race, Ethnicity, Social Class, and Disability
3. 11 Common English Words and Phrases with Racist Origins

5. Disability and Health
- If disability is not relevant to the topic, consider leaving that information out of your writing.
- Try not to use terms with negative associations when describing or discussing disabilities or aspects of a person's life. Examples of words that you might want to consider not using are suffering or afflicted when describing or discussing disabilities, and poor when referring to someone who is living with an income below the poverty line.
- Individuals with disabilities may be portrayed as inspirational or heroes because they live with a certain disability. Having a disability does not make a person inspirational or heroic, just like the mundane, daily life of any person does not inspirational or heroic. Before writing about how inspirational someone is, really consider (and indicate) what it is that you think is inspirational about them.
- Many common idioms, colloquialisms, metaphors, and slang in the English language have abelist origins or coded meanings. Conducting research can help inform work products and avoid them from being perceived as offensive.
- Below are a few grammatical rules to consider when writing about children and youth with special healthcare needs:
  - Capitalize a group name when talking about a cultural community.
    - Example: Deaf culture

Resources:
1. [NYLN: Respectful Disability Language: Here's What's Up](#)
2. [REACH: Guidelines For Writing And Referring To People with Disabilities](#)
3. [Rooted in Rights: If You're Writing About Disability, You Need to Read These Guidelines](#)
4. [NCDJ: Disability Language Style Guide](#)
5. [ADANN: Guidelines for Writing about People with Disabilities](#)
6. [Adaptive Sports Center: Five Tips for Writing About People with Disabilities](#)
7. [APA Style: Guidelines for Non-Handicapping Language in APA Journals](#)

6. Picking and Using Inclusive Images

Using inclusive imagery when possible is important because the content should reflect the diversity of our end users. It is important for people to be able to see themselves reflected in the world around them; it affects not only their perception of self, but it also creates a sense of belonging in this society. Below are some things to consider when selecting images:

Tips for Choosing Inclusive Images
- Recognize and interrupt your own biases.
- Ask yourself questions about the images you are selecting.
    - Who is missing?
    - Can any of these photos be swapped out to include a different type of person?
    - Would I want to be portrayed this way?
    - If this was a photo of me or my loved ones, would I be okay with the way they are represented?
    - Does this image perpetuate stereotypes?
    - Can everyone who views these photos see someone that looks like them represented?
- Make a demographic checklist. Are these demographics represented in your images? Should they be?
    - Races/Ethnicities
    - Genders
    - Ages
    - Abilities
    - Body Types

Diverse Image Sources:
1. [Vice: The Gender Spectrum Collection: Stock Photos Beyond the Binary](#)

2. Nappy: Beautiful Photos of Black and Brown People for Free
3. The Jopwell Collection Volume 1: Free Stock Images of our Community at Work
4. The Jopwell Collection: Intern Edition
5. Pexels: Free Stock Photos
6. Disabled and Here: Disability Led Stock Images

Resources
1. How to Choose Diverse and Inclusive Photos
2. Three Simple Strategies for Sourcing Inclusive Imagery
3. Choosing Culturally Responsive Images
4. Best Practices for Diverse and Inclusive Photography

7. **End Product Accessibility**
Depending on the audience for your end product (document, video, toolkit, etc.) it may be important to consider adding some additional features to ensure that it can be utilized by people with various abilities. Below are some features you may consider adding to make your end products more accessible:
- Using captions for videos and Zoom meetings
- Adding Alt Text for any images that you are using
- Using high contrast to assist with better visibility. There are even tools out there that allow users to switch the end product into dark mode.
- Flashing animations can be difficult for a variety of end users. Consider if the flashing animation could be replaced with a different image.
- Offering a magnifying tool
- Using descriptive link texts
- Tagging PDFs

Resources:
1. WebAIM: Alternative Text
2. WebAIM: Skip Navigation Links
3. WebAIM: PDF Accessibility
4. How to Make your Event Accessible to the Disability Community
5. Zoom: Closed Captioning and Live Transcription
6. Section508.Gov