



# Royal Historical Society of Victoria

## Inclusive Language Style Guide

*The following guide for the use of language that is culturally appropriate and respectful of the diversity of Australia's peoples, has been developed by the RHSV Diversity and Inclusion Working Party. This document is intended to guide the language used across the RHSV, including in publications and online.*

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It should be noted that this guide references language use in the present. It is not intended to be applied retrospectively to historical source material, or, for example, to the names of organisations in the past. However, where language used in historical sources might now be considered derogatory, it is recommended that a warning be added to the reference or article concerned.

Disclaimer: 'The information provided in this Guide has been sourced from relevant online sources, such as websites and Australian government guides. These have been listed and can be used for further information. The authors assume no responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions in the content of this Guide. The information contained in this Guide is provided on an 'as is' basis, with no guarantee of completeness, accuracy, usefulness, or timeliness, or of the results obtained for the use of this information. None of the authors or the RHSV can be held responsible, in any way whatsoever, for your use of the information contained in or linked to this Guide'.

Adopted by the Council of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria 29 October 2024

## In brief

This page is a two-page summary of the content, printable for sticking in a handy location.

When referring to Inclusive Language the State Government of Victoria refers to the Australian Government Style Manual: <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language><sup>1</sup>

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

#### DO USE:

- specific terms for Aboriginal nations (e.g. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung), like the name of a community (e.g. Kulin nations), before using broader terms (First Australians, First Nations people, Aboriginal people, Indigenous people)
- Indigenous peoples when referring to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- plurals when speaking about collectives (peoples, nations, cultures, languages)
- present tense, unless speaking about a past event

#### DON'T USE:

- shorthand terms like 'Aborigines', 'Islanders' or acronyms like 'ATSI', 'Aboriginals'
- terms like 'myth', 'legend' or 'folklore' when referring to the beliefs of First Nations people
- blood quantum (for example, 'half-caste' or percentage measures)<sup>2</sup>
- 'us versus them' or deficit language
- possessive terms such as 'our', as in 'our Aboriginal peoples'
- 'Australian Indigenous peoples', as it also implies ownership, much like 'our'.

#### CONSIDER:

- While the term 'Indigenous Australians' is in common use, many First Nations people may not be comfortable with it. Using 'Indigenous Australians' to refer to First Australians is relatively recent. Its use became popular through international discussions, where the term 'indigenous' is appropriate (with a lowercase 'i'). But it is a blanket term that homogenises a wide array of peoples and cultures. This can cause offence.

### Age diversity

#### DO USE:

- the word 'people' with age reference where relevant
- 'Older people' or 'younger people'
- 'Youth' as a gender neutral term
- A student's year level to refer to their age, e.g. 'postgraduate students' etc

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<sup>1</sup> The "Cultural and linguistic diversity" and "People with disability" sections of this Style Guide are based on the Australian Government Style Manual website.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'half-caste' was used in legislation during the nineteenth century, for example the Victorian Aborigines Protection Act of 1886, and had a significant impact on First Nations people in Victoria. More information can be found on the State Library Victoria website: <https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/c.php?g=245277&p=1632993>

DON'T USE:

- Stereotypes e.g. 'elderly' or 'youths'
- 'Junior' or 'juniors'

Cultural and linguistic diversity

DO USE:

- 'Australians' to refer to people living in Australia, e.g. 'Japanese-Australians'
- 'Culturally and linguistically diverse communities'

DON'T USE:

- 'Migrants', 'immigrants', 'new arrivals' to refer to people who have recently arrived in Australia
- CALD

Gender and sexual diversity

DO USE:

- Gender neutral language
- A person's preferred pronoun/s
- LGBTIQ+ to refer to lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, asexual, and other sexual identities

DON'T USE:

- Language that discriminates against a person based on their sex, marital or relationship status, actual or potential pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status.

People with disability

DO

- Check if an individual or community prefers person-first language ('people with disability') OR identity-first language ('disabled person')
- Be responsive to feedback received about individual or community preferences
- Use person-first language when preferences are not known, e.g. 'person who is blind or has low vision' and 'person living with disability' (note the absence of the 'a').

DON'T USE:

- person with a disability, handicapped person, handicapped parking, crippled, invalid, incapacitated, mad, mute, deaf and dumb, deaf person, blind person, person without sight.
- Don't say a person is inspirational only because of their disability.
- Don't write about people as if they are heroes or victims.
- Avoid euphemisms and made-up terms, such as 'differently abled' and 'handicapable'.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Aboriginal people comprise diverse nations, each with their own language and traditions and historically have lived on mainland Australia, Tasmania or on many of the continent's offshore islands. Torres Strait Islander peoples come from the islands of the Torres Strait, between the tip of Cape York in Queensland and Papua New Guinea. Torres Strait Islanders are of Melanesian origin with their own distinct identity, history and cultural traditions. Many Torres Strait Islanders live on mainland Australia.

Since Australia was colonised, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been referred to using several words, some of which are today considered derogatory. It is important to avoid using outdated, derogatory, or offensive terminology, such as 'native', 'Aborigine', or any other words considered a racial slur. These words may be disrespectful and can also contribute to the ongoing marginalisation and discrimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>3</sup>

Care should be taken when using these terms. For example, it is not appropriate, and may be offensive, to refer to some Aboriginal people as Kooris. In addition, you should be aware that there are terms which Aboriginal people use to describe themselves e.g. 'black Australians', which may not be appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use.

For appropriate terminology relating to the description of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials in library and archives collections see *Guidelines for First Nations collection description* by Tui Raven: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3250767341/view>.

Respectful language use starts with the basics

DO USE:

- specific terms for Aboriginal nations (e.g. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung), like the name of a community (e.g. Kulin nations), before using broader terms (First Australians, First Nations people, Aboriginal people, Indigenous people)
- plurals when speaking about collectives (peoples, nations, cultures, languages)
- present tense, unless speaking about a past event

DON'T USE:

- shorthand terms like 'Aborigines', 'Islanders' or acronyms like 'ATSI', or 'Aboriginals'
- using terms like 'myth', 'legend' or 'folklore' when referring to the beliefs of First Nations people
- blood quantum (for example, 'half-caste' or percentage measures)
- 'us versus them' or deficit language
- possessive terms such as 'our', as in 'our Aboriginal peoples'
- 'Australian Indigenous peoples', as it also implies ownership, much like 'our'.

CONSIDER:

- While the term 'Indigenous Australians' is in common use, many First Australians may not be comfortable with it. Using 'Indigenous Australians' to refer to First Australians is relatively recent. Its use became popular through international discussions, where the term

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<sup>3</sup> <https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/download.php?id=140&version=1>

'indigenous' is appropriate (with a lowercase 'i'). But it is a blanket term that homogenises a wide array of peoples and cultures. This can cause offence.

See the Australian Government's *Style Manual* for more detail:

[https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples#respectful\\_language\\_use\\_starts\\_with\\_the\\_basics](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples#respectful_language_use_starts_with_the_basics).

## Age diversity

Use respectful and inclusive language that talks to the person, not their difference. It's the law.

Avoid referring to a person's age or an age group if it's not relevant.

Avoid characterising age references when it's not strictly relevant.

Standalone words in everyday use, like 'old' and 'young', can carry bias or unintended subtext. Words that carry stereotypes, for example 'elderly', are not acceptable.

When an age or age range is relevant to a fact, you can use the term 'people' with the age reference. For example: 'people aged 15 to 17 responded to the survey....'

### **Older people**

The term 'older people' is acceptable, the term 'old people' is considered disrespectful. Other accepted terms are: 'retired people or retirees'; 'older Australians'; 'senior Australians or seniors'.

### **Young people**

The most neutral term is 'young people'. 'Youth' is a gender-neutral term and is also acceptable.

Be careful using the plural 'youths'. This is often used to refer to male youths only and may carry other connotations.

Avoid using 'junior' or 'juniors'.

Refer to students by their level of study, not their age, unless age is relevant: 'preschool students'; 'high-school students'; 'postgraduate students'.

## Cultural linguistic diversity

Use inclusive language that respects the diverse cultural backgrounds and languages of Australians. You can use the general term 'multicultural communities' to write about people from different cultural backgrounds.

People writing for government sometimes use the term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' (CALD) communities. Avoid using the acronym unless speaking to a specialist audience.

**In Australia, it is a legal requirement to use respectful and inclusive language that talks to the person, not their difference.** Commonwealth laws include:

- [Racial Discrimination Act 1975](#)
- [Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986](#)
- [Public Service Act 1999](#)

**Mention people’s cultural affinity or identity only when you need to.** Australians speak many languages and have many cultural and religious beliefs. Each culture has its own values and beliefs. You can be sensitive to these differences when you write, through doing user research. The Australian Government Style Manual website provides detailed information on user research: <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/writing-and-designing-content/user-research-and-content>

**Avoid using words such as ‘ethnic Australians’ or ‘ethnic groups’.** The use of the term ethnic is no longer desirable, as it can imply that migrant heritage or migrant status is unusual.

**Refer to people living in Australia as ‘Australians’.** The meaning of the word ‘Australian’ can vary in different contexts. It could mean anyone who lives in Australia. Legally, it could mean only people who are Australian citizens. Depending on the type of content, you might need to explain what you mean by the term. For example, ‘Australian students’ could refer to all students in Australia including international students.

**Mention heritage, cultural or other national identity only if necessary.** Consult the Australian Government Style Manual website on how to refer to nationalities, peoples and places outside Australia: [https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/names-and-terms/nationalities-peoples-and-places-outside-australia#write\\_nationalities\\_peoples\\_and\\_places\\_with\\_initial\\_capitals](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/names-and-terms/nationalities-peoples-and-places-outside-australia#write_nationalities_peoples_and_places_with_initial_capitals)

**Dual Identity** – when specifying a dual identity or other heritage as an adjective, connect the reference and the term ‘Australian’ with a dash, examples include:

- The Japanese–Australian community takes part in the Summer Festival in Melbourne. (Dual identity expressed as an adjective.)
- Japanese Australians take part in the Summer Festival in Melbourne. (Dual identity expressed as a noun phrase.)

**Not this:** Many Japanese take part in the Summer Festival in Melbourne. (Does not convey dual identity of community or individuals)

**When referring to people who have recently migrated to Australia,** use neutral words such as:

- ‘migrants’
- ‘immigrants’
- ‘new arrivals’

**Do not use these terms**

- **Once people have settled and become Australian citizens.** They suggest a temporary or marginal status.
- **When referring to refugees.** According to the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), “People who are likely to be asylum-seekers or refugees should not be referred to as migrants. To do so can undermine the legal protections afforded to refugees under international law.” Please refer to the UNHCR website for detailed information on difference between a refugee and a migrant which is accessible by clicking on this link:

<https://www.unhcr.org/refugees#:~:text=The%201951%20Refugee%20Convention%20defines,such%20fear%2C%20is%20unwilling%20to>

**Use the terms ‘given name’ and ‘family name’.** Many world-wide naming systems differ from those used in English-speaking countries. Given names come before family names in English-speaking countries. In some Asian cultures, people write the family name first. Example: Wong Hei, Takeshi Noboyuki.

This is not always obvious. Sometimes, the owners of names foresee the possible confusion for English speakers, and they reverse the order in an English-speaking context. Example: Hei Wong, Noboyuki Takeshi.

**When you ask for a person’s name:**

**Ask for their:**

- given name
- family name

**Do not ask for ‘Christian name’, ‘first name’, ‘forename’ or ‘surname’.** These terms all take for granted the European conventions and order of names.

**Some people state a preferred name instead of their given name.** This could be different from their legal name, so be clear about which you need. Some countries have variations of name order. For example:

- **In Indonesia**, some people have only one name. They might use this in Australia for both their given name and family name to conform with Western conventions.
- **In Myanmar**, names are not divided into given and family names. These names keep their full form instead.

For more on this rule, refer to guidance on personal names on the Australian Government Style Manual website: [https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/names-and-terms/personal-names#follow\\_reliable\\_sources\\_for\\_nonenglish\\_names](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/names-and-terms/personal-names#follow_reliable_sources_for_nonenglish_names)

## Gender and sexual diversity

Inclusive language conveys gender equality and is gender neutral. Respect peoples’ preferences around gender and sexual identity with pronoun choice, job titles and personal titles.

**Use gender neutral language**

Use terms that recognise gender equality. Avoid terms that discriminate on the basis of a person’s gender or sexual identity.

Our use of language reflects changes in society. There is wide agreement about using language to support equality between all genders.

It is unlawful to discriminate against a person under the [Sex Discrimination Act 1984](#). This discrimination relates to their:

- sex
- marital or relationship status
- actual or potential pregnancy
- sexual orientation
- gender identity
- intersex status.

### **Pronoun choice**

Learn the user's preferred [pronoun](#). If it's not clear and you can't ask them, choose gender-neutral pronouns.

The singular 'they' is gender-neutral. It avoids specifying a person's gender.

You can use 'they' or 'them' when you would otherwise use a singular personal pronoun such as:

- 'he'
- 'she'
- 'him'
- 'her'.

You can also use 'themselves' or 'themselves' instead of 'himself' or 'herself'. 'Themselves' is an extension of using 'they' for a single person.

The use of gender-neutral pronouns to refer to a person of unknown gender has a long history. Usage now covers people who either:

- don't wish to identify as a particular gender
- identify as non-binary or gender-fluid.

### **LGBTI and LGBTIQ+ communities**

The term LGBT arose in the 1990s to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The term has since expanded to LGBTI, to include intersex people. LGBTI is now widely accepted and used.

Recently, the term has expanded again to LGBTIQ, LGBTIQ+ or LGBTIQA+. The 'Q' refers to the queer community or to people questioning their gender identity. The 'A' refers to asexual people. The newer terms are used less frequently. The use of '+' represents other sexual identities.

See also *LGBTIQA+ glossary of common terms* <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/lgbtqa-glossary-common-terms>.

## People with disability

### ***Focus on the person, not the disability***

Mention disability only when it's relevant to the content. When writing about people with disability, focus on the person. Engage with people through user research which can uncover whether an individual or community preference is:

- person-first language
- identity-first language.

Use person-first language for content unless user research says otherwise. Example:

- people with disability (Person-first language)
- disabled person (Identity-first language)

Be responsive if you get feedback on the language you've used. It can guide user research around language that respects individual or community preferences.

### **Accessibility and inclusivity requirements**

Must design accessible content to meet the Digital Service Standard:

- [Criterion 1. Understand user needs](#)
- [Criterion 9. Make it accessible](#)

### **Commonwealth laws include:**

- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)
- [Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986](#)

### **Use respectful language**

Respectful language acknowledges peoples' preferences to identify with a particular community or characteristic.

Terms should not identify people without an understanding of personal preference. For example, many people who are deaf or hard of hearing may identify as 'Deaf' – a cultural group with a different first language.

Avoid using the disability as an adjective that defines the person unless that is their preference. Use the word 'disability' as an uncountable noun (see the Australian Government Style Manual website: <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/types-words/nouns> )

Use person-first language when you don't understand individual or community preferences. Describe the person and then the characteristic. Examples:

### **Write this:**

- person with disability
- person who is deaf or hard of hearing
- person who is blind or has low vision
- person living with disability
- person with mental illness, person with psychosocial disability, person with a psychiatric condition
- person with intellectual disability, person with developmental disability
- person with learning disability
- person with cognitive disability
- person who uses a wheelchair or mobility device
- person with reduced mobility
- person with physical disability
- accessible parking

### **Not this:**

person with a disability  
handicapped person  
handicapped parking  
crippled  
invalid  
incapacitated  
mad  
mute  
deaf and dumb  
deaf person  
blind person  
person without sight

You can cause offence when you do not use respectful language, even if it is well intentioned.

- Don't say a person is inspirational only because of their disability.
- Don't write about people as if they are heroes or victims.
- Avoid euphemisms and made-up terms, such as 'differently abled' and 'handicapable'.

People with disability could consider these types of terms condescending. When making comparisons, write:

- 'person without disability' – rather than 'able-bodied'
- 'sighted person' for someone who is not blind
- 'hearing person' for someone who is not deaf
- 'neurotypical' for someone who is not autistic.

### **The social model of disability**

The traditional view of disability has been a medical model. In this approach, disability is a health condition for health professionals to treat, fix or cure.

Many people with disability prefer the social model of disability approach. This is a way to understand how people with disability interact with their environment and others.

The social model focuses on shifting the problem from individual impairments to the social environment. From this viewpoint, disability arises from the way people with disability interact with the world. They encounter barriers which block participation in society, such as:

- physical barriers
- digital barriers
- barriers of attitudes,
- and communication barriers

The social model recognises the reality of a disability and its effects and advocates of this model focus on the barriers to participating in society faced by people living with disability. By contrast, the medical model looks at impairments that create a medical condition. For more information on the social model of disability see: The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations website: <https://www.afdo.org.au/social-model-of-disability/>

### **People who are blind or have low vision**

'Legal blindness' and being 'legally blind' have specific definitions. In government use, these terms relate a person's sight loss to eligibility criteria. Many people who are legally blind do have some vision.

The terms 'blind' and 'low vision' include people with no sight and people who have some sight.

A person who is totally blind does not perceive light and has no usable vision. A person who has low vision has some ability to see. Wearing regular glasses will not improve their vision.

A person who is blind or who has low vision might use screen reading software, Braille displays, or screen magnification technology to access content. People who are blind might use other ways to communicate using hearing or touch.

Acceptable terms include 'person who is blind' and 'person who has low vision'. Don't write 'the blind' or 'person without sight'.

### **People who are deaf or hard of hearing**

The terms 'deaf' and 'hard of hearing' include people with no hearing or limited hearing. They may have difficulty using audio content. When providing audio content, make the information available in other ways – such as captions and a transcript.

The World Federation of the Deaf disapproves of the term 'hearing impaired' as it describes people as if they have a deficiency.

Refer to someone with hearing loss as a 'person who is deaf or hard of hearing'. Some people who are deaf or hard of hearing use the Australian sign language, Auslan.

Some people who are deaf or hard of hearing view themselves as members of a community and language group. This community calls itself the Deaf community and encourages others to do the same. The Deaf community uses the term with a capital letter 'D' as a mark of its identity.

Members of the Deaf community might still use deaf with a lowercase 'd' to refer to their hearing.

### **People with cognitive disability**

People with cognitive disability include people with intellectual disability, acquired brain injury or dementia.

'Cognitive disability' is a broad term that covers a range of conditions. Genes, illnesses, injury, physical factors or environmental factors may cause cognitive disability.

Creating content in more than one format, such as making an Easy Read version, can help some people with cognitive disability access information. Follow W3C<sup>44</sup> updates on making content usable for people with cognitive and learning disabilities: <https://www.w3.org/TR/coga-usable/>

### **People with learning disability**

People with 'learning disability' might have difficulty planning and difficulty processing new information. The causes are neurological. They are difficult to address and can be lifelong.

Some Australian support groups and educators use 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability' for all people who have difficulty learning a basic academic skill.

Learning disability is not the same as a learning difficulty, which can be overcome with intensive teaching or training and is not generally considered to be disability.

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<sup>44</sup> The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international public-interest non-profit organization where Member organizations, a full-time staff, and the public work together to develop Web standards. The Web Consortium's mission is to lead the web to its full potential. (<https://www.w3.org/about/> )

Examples of learning disabilities are dyslexia (reading), dyscalculia (mathematics) and various auditory processing disorders (sound and verbal instructions). Having a learning disability is not related to intelligence.

### **People with mental illness**

'Mental illness' is a broad term that covers many different conditions that influence the way people act, think, feel or see the world.

The term 'psychosocial disability' is specific to some people with severe mental health conditions. It covers both psychological and social factors and focuses on restrictions on participating in society.

Not every mental illness involves a psychosocial disability. Some ways of talking about mental illness can cause offence.

Use people-first language when you refer to a person with mental illness. For example:

#### **Write this:**

people with mental illness  
people with mental ill-health

#### **Not this:**

the mentally ill

Describe the person as 'having' mental illness, just as you would for any other illness or injury. Don't describe the person as 'being' a disease. For example,

#### **Write this:**

Rupert has schizophrenia.  
Alice has depression.  
Lu has bipolar disorder.

#### **Not this:**

Rupert is a schizophrenic.  
Alice is a depressive.  
Lu is bipolar.

Mental illness can attract social stigma which may prevent people from acknowledging their mental health conditions and talking about them with others. There is advice about the best language to use for mental illness in guides from the Australian Human Rights Commission (see <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/appendix-c-how-talk-about-mental-illness>) and Everymind (see <https://everymind.org.au/understanding-mental-health/mental-health/language-and-stigma>)

### **Neurodiversity**

The term 'neurodiversity' refers to the idea that neurological differences, such as autism and ADHD, sit within the normal spectrum of human variation. Neurological differences are not always a disability. Advocates refer to the diverse range of differences in the brain and behaviour. They say societal barriers are the main factors disabling people.

Neurodiversity was first used for people on the autism spectrum. It is now also applied to other conditions, such as dyslexia.

### Further reading

(From the “People with Disability” section of the Australian Government Style Manual website: <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language/people-disability>)

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (n.d.) '[Learning difficulty versus learning disability](#)', *Specific learning disability*, ADCET website, accessed 6 November 2019.

Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative (2019) [Inclusive publishing in Australia: an introductory guide](#), AIPI website, accessed 21 May 2020.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (September 2019) [People with disability in Australia](#), AIHW, accessed 25 August 2020.

[Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (New York, 13 December 2006) [2008], UNTS 2515 p. 3.

Inclusion Australia (n.d.) [What is intellectual disability?](#), Inclusion Australia website, accessed 10 September 2020.

Vision Australia (n.d.) [Blindness and vision loss](#), Vision Australia website, accessed 22 May 2020.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (December 2019), [Issues paper: health care for people with cognitive disability](#), Disability

Royal Commission website (accessed 3 September 2020).

Worldwide Web Consortium (2020) [Making content usable for people with cognitive and learning disabilities](#) [working draft], W3C website, accessed 27 August 2020.

W3C (2017) [Diverse abilities and barriers](#), W3C website, accessed 25 August 2020.

## Glossary

### **Cultural safety**

The Australian Human Rights Commission Social Justice Report 2011 defines cultural safety as: “An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening”. For further detail on this subject see the full report [here](#).

### **Community language/s**

This term generally refers to the non-Indigenous languages other than English which are spoken in Australia.

### **Ethnic group**

An historically distinct people with specific characteristics, demonstrating a degree of institutional development along ethnic lines, and drawn together by their language and the pursuit of economic, political, social and cultural interests.

Ethnicity is distinct from race, which usually refers to physical attributes such as skin colour. The word ‘ethnic’ is often inaccurately equated with ‘foreign’ or ‘other’, and is frequently applied to non-

Anglo-Celtic immigrants and immigrant groups. However, everybody has an ethnicity and belongs to an ethnic group. Use of the label 'ethnics' to describe immigrants or people from a non-English speaking background is inaccurate and often offensive and should be avoided.

**Ethnic**

A group within a population which is different from the dominant minority group with regard to such characteristics as language, culture and / or religion. This difference frequently results in discriminatory treatment.

**ESL**

English as a second language. The term indicates that English is someone's second language; it does not indicate a person's competence in English.

**Immigrant**

A person involved in the process of immigration or someone who has recently arrived in Australia.

The term 'immigrant' is preferred to the term 'migrant'. If someone has been in Australia for a considerable period of time, it is preferred to avoid using 'immigrant' as a description. 'Immigrant' should not be used exclusively to refer to people of non-English-speaking background.

**LBOTE**

Language background other than English.

**LOTE**

Language other than English.

**NESB**

Non-English-Speaking Background.

**Race**

The concept of race is used to categorise people based on physical appearance. Although scientific arguments about the inherent inferiority of racial groups have been continually debunked, race is a social construct that continues to have significant effects on people's lives (Furze et al. 2015). The term 'race' started to be used in the 16th century. However, the concept that biological features such as hair type or skin colour were indications of behavioural traits can be traced back to ancient civilisations (Rattansi 2007). In the 18th and 19th centuries, many attempts were made by scientists to classify and explain race, underpinned by the idea that there was a hierarchy of civilisations with some races being superior to others. At this time, European colonisers regarded the peoples they colonised as inferior. This was linked to Enlightenment ideas of civilisational 'progress'. Today, 'race as a biological category has lost nearly all meaning' (Furze et al. 2015, p. 338), prompting some biologists to suggest that 'race' should no longer be used in science. Many social scientists, however, argue that it is necessary to continue to use the term because 'perceptions of race affect the lives of many people profoundly' (Furze et al. 2015, p. 338). The idea or perception of race continues to lead to social inequality and discrimination. Finally, it is important to note that although they are sometimes used interchangeably, race and ethnicity have different meanings.

SOURCES: Furze, B, Savy, P, Webb, R, James, S, Petray, T, Brym, RJ & Lie, J 2015, *Sociology in today's world*, 3rd edn, Cengage, South Melbourne.

Rattansi, A 2007, *Racism: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

The above definition comes from *Key Concepts in the Humanities and Social Sciences* by Sarah Midford, Sara James, Garrie Hutchinson (2018) DOI: <http://doi.org/10.26826/1006>  
License: [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

**Refugee**

A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (UN Convention 1951 UN Protocol 1967).

**Strengths-based language**

A strength-based approach is a way of working or writing that focuses on abilities, knowledge and capacities rather than deficits, or things that are lacking. It is recommended that this approach be used when writing about people and groups listed in this language guide.