

# Language Matters Newsletter

EQUITY, DIVERSITY,  
INCLUSION AND  
ACCESSIBILITY (EDIA)

September 2025



## Why Language Matters in EDIA

### Welcome to Language Matters!

This academic year, our department's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) committee is launching **Language Matters**, a newsletter providing resources to support faculty in using language that promotes belonging, reduces stigma, and reflects our commitment to EDIA.

Each issue will explore how the words we choose can:

- Build belonging or unintentionally reinforce exclusion
- Support equity or perpetuate stigma
- Reflect our values as a department committed to respectful and inclusive teaching, research, and practice

Language matters because it shapes how people experience identity, community, and safety. Small shifts in language can create meaningful changes that foster inclusive, respectful, and equity-focused communication in our classrooms, labs, and research settings.

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### IMPORTANT NOTE

Terminology is ever-changing and highly personal. Before using any expression, please verify that it is still considered accurate, respectful, and aligned with current community preferences. Listen to how people identify themselves and follow their lead.

When in doubt, ask persons with lived experiences what terminology they prefer!

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September 30



## Spotlight: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

On September 30, Canada observes the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, coinciding with Orange Shirt Day. This day honours:

- Survivors of residential schools and their families
- The children who never returned home
- The ongoing impacts of colonial policies on Indigenous Peoples



### How Language Matters

- Avoid terms like 'Indian', 'Eskimo', 'Native Canadian', or 'Aboriginal' – they are inaccurate or colonial
- Use specific Nation or community names whenever possible (e.g., Mi'kmaq Nation, Anishinaabe community/people)
- When specificity isn't possible, use Indigenous Peoples or First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples
- Recognize that land acknowledgments should be spoken with intent and followed by action

### Try This

*Instead of:* "Canada's Indigenous people suffered in residential schools"

*Say:* "First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were forced into residential schools by the Canadian government and churches."



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## Language Tip of the Month

### Person-First or Community-First Language?

**Person-First Language** emphasizes the individual first, then the characteristic or condition.

*Example:* “person with a disability” or “person experiencing housing insecurity”

Used When

- The person or group prefers to emphasize personhood before a label
- You want to avoid defining someone solely by their condition or identity
- It’s common in many medical, clinical, and rehabilitation contexts

Rationale

- Avoids reducing people to a diagnosis or social status
- Reinforces dignity and humanity as primary

**Community-first language** emphasizes collective identity and self-determination

*Example:* “Mi’kmaq Nation”

### Culturally Specific Gender Identity

**Two-Spirit** is the term chosen by some Indigenous people to describe a gender identity that includes both masculine and feminine components or ‘spirits’. The term reflects roles, responsibilities, and understandings of gender and sexuality that are specific to each Indigenous Nation’s culture and traditions. Not all Indigenous people who belong to the LGBTQIA+ community identify as Two-Spirit, and the term should only be used in its proper cultural context.



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## ***Looking Ahead***

### **Next Newsletter: Talking About Mental Health Responsibly**

We'll explore how to reduce stigma and adopt respectful, inclusive language in the classroom, research, and clinical contexts.

### **Further Learning Resources**

Explore the following resources for deeper learning on Truth and Reconciliation, respectful Indigenous language use, and EDIA in Canadian contexts:

- Indigenous Incorporate Training <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-terminology-guidelines-for-usage>
- Queen's University, Office of Indigenous Initiatives – Terminology Guide <https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/ways-knowing/terminology-guide>
- University of British Columbia, Indigenous Foundations – Terminology <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/>
- Government of Canada – First Nations, Inuit and Métis Historical Terminology <https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/indigenous-history/indigenous-terminology.html>
- Native Governance Center – How to Talk About Native Nations: A Guide How to Talk about Native Nations: A Guide <https://nativegov.org/news/how-to-talk-about-native-nations-a-guide/>
- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (University of Manitoba) – Reports <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada – Calls to Action <https://indigenoushealth.womenscollegehospital.ca/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-of-canada-calls-to-action-trc-cta>
- Government of Canada – Towards Truth and Reconciliation: A Learning Resource Guide <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/towards-truth-and-reconciliation.html>
- Women's College Hospital Centre for Wise Practices – Indigenous Language Guide <https://indigenoushealth.womenscollegehospital.ca/accountability-and-rights/language-guide>
- Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/>
- Canadian Human Rights Commission – Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/indigenous-peoples-and-human-rights>
- Assembly of First Nations – Truth and Reconciliation Resources <https://www.afn.ca/policy-sectors/residential-schools/>
- Library and Archives Canada – Indigenous Heritage Resources: <https://library-archives.canada.ca/eng/collection/indigenous-heritage/pages/indigenous-heritage.aspx>

*Thank you for reading!*

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