No Offense? 😬
Some Terms and Phrases to Become Aware of, Potentially Avoid, and Why

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Language, as a part of our everyday culture, is always evolving. This process can make it confusing and awkward to navigate how words have changed in meaning and use over time, especially when we learn our patterns of speech from the people around us of different ages, backgrounds, and opinions.

For these and other reasons, it is important to become aware of discussions surrounding the terminology we encounter in our daily lives, as it enables us to engage others respectfully and become more responsible members of society. It is natural that these terms sometimes produce anxiety and uncertainty, or even be uncomfortable to think about, especially if we have used them in the past or present, and if we are accustomed to speaking or thinking a certain way.

This list below is not meant as a "banned word" list or as a way to impose an ideology, but as a way to help you think critically about language in your writing and everyday life, as well as understand the history you see on paper and being made in your surrounding environment.

The list is not exhaustive, but introduces some of the common mistakes seen in writing (both student and professional!) in the North American context. These terms are explained as simply and as straight-forward as possible, but there are long, complex debates about the origin of these issues and about the use of terms (sometimes individuals differ in preference!). We encourage you to investigate them more deeply on your own and be sensitive to people's preferred terminology.

Each section below is separated into the following categories:

- Gender, Sex, and Sexuality
- Race, Ethnicity, and Religion
- Medicine, Mental State, and the Body
- Time, Place

If you have further suggestions or comments, please direct them to: https://bit.ly/No_Offense

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Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Term/Phrase	How is it misused? What does it imply?	What should I use instead?
females	*Grammatically:* "Female" is primarily used as an adjective; it is descriptive-- a female what? *Scientifically:* "Female" is a scientific, adjectival term that refers to the sex of a species capable of reproducing. In other words, by saying "female" without adding "human being," you reduce women to being defined only by their reproductive functions. In other words, it makes a woman an object with a function, not a person. Also, not all women have the same sets of reproductive organs/are assigned female at birth, so by using "female" as a general term for "women," you inadvertently exclude communities of women. *Diminutively:* "Females" is often used in the context of belittling women and treating them as inferior, particularly for the reasons given above.	women If you feel like you have to use "female" to modify something, first ask yourself if it is necessary. Does your statement change if you say "female reporter," or is it just as effective to say "reporter"? What work is "female" doing as a descriptor?
girls	When you are referring to adult women, using the term "girls" creates an age-gender hierarchy, suggesting that grown women are somehow less mature and less powerful than men. Examine your writing-- did you refer to men in the essay as "men" or as "boys"? If you are talking about adults, the terms "boys" and "girls" should not be used.	women
mankind, man	Although in the past, the terms "mankind" or "man" have been used to describe the human species or humanity at large, this view privileges men as the origin or representation of civilization to the exclusion of others.	humankind, humans, people
"he/him/his" for "the reader"	When writing, sometimes we refer to hypothetical or unknown authors, readers, or writers. For a long time the standard has been to write "he" when the gender of the reader is not known. However, rather than creating gender bias with "he" or wordy "he or she" "he/she," it is preferable to use gender neutral pronouns, which are grammatically correct. If you're a *Game of Thrones* fan, think: "A Lannister always pays their debts."	they/them/their
prostitute, hooker, whore	Terms such as "hooker" and "whore" have long been in use as derogatory slang for women seen to be promiscuous or	sex worker

	who perform sex acts for money. "Prostitute," although used in the past as a more technical term, carries implicit associations seen as dehumanizing. Its association with assumptions about a person's criminal activity, drug status, family and economic background, hygiene, and integrity create a predetermined value judgment about their person.	"sex worker" is now used as an umbrella term that acknowledges the wide variety of labor people of diverse statuses and employment conduct within the sex industry
transgendered	Aside from being grammatically incorrect, "transgendered" implies that something has been done to someone, rather than describing who someone is. (Compare to other descriptors: We don't say Italianed or Irished, right?)	transgender (adj) transgender man transgender woman
transsexual, tranny, shemale, heshe	"Transexual" is an outdated term that was used in the medical and psychological communities to distinguish between those who underwent sex reassignment surgery. However, it has largely been rejected and replaced with the term "transgender," as "transexual" is seen as suggesting a connection to sexuality rather than gender identity. Terms such as "transexual" and "transvestite" have been used in trans communities in the past, especially through the 1970s and 80s, so you may sometimes see them still used by people who would now be labelled transgender.	transgender
female bodied/male bodied, biologically female/male, born a girl/boy	In discussions of birth, sex, and gender, there has been a shift from describing "sex" as biological and "gender" as sociological, instead just lumping them together as "gender." This is part because most people don't know the details of their chromosomal makeup and the human body has tons of variation—different people have different secondary sex characteristics to different degrees, 1 in 2000 babies are intersex, etc. This language removes the idea that "genitals/reproductive organs represent biological destiny" and opens up the idea that "different people have different bodies." For example, to say "assigned female at birth" could mean "my doctors and parents took a look at my genitals and decided without asking me that I was a girl" or, in other cases, "my genitals were considered ambiguous and my doctor and parents performed surgery to make them look 'normal' to some people and assigned me female then." (The latter may be referred to as "coercively assigned __ at birth.")	assigned female/male at birth designated female/male at birth
homosexual	"Homosexual" is an outdated term that was originally used to pathologize same-sex attraction as a medical illness. Anti-gay extremists use this term to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered. It should only be used, if necessary, within quotations. Instead of "homosexuality," you might use "same-sex attraction" or a term more specific to what you want to describe (e.g. "bisexuality"). *Note: If you are working on premodern topics, it may be*	gay/lesbian/bisexual when describing bisexual people in relationships, you can use "bisexual couple" if both are bi, or "mixed orientation" or "same-sex couple" depending on your emphasis

	useful to discuss with your instructor and/or read research on language use that may help you to avoid projecting contemporary forms of sexual identity/orientation onto people in other time periods or cultures. One important consideration in any such research is often to look at primary sources from those times and think about what kind of language or structures of meaning they themselves used to describe their circumstances.	
"gay and trans"	When describing various communities, be sure to be specific. By generalizing, you may unintentionally exclude groups that are equally deserving of representation. To say "gay and trans," for example, ignores that bisexuals also exist. While it is impossible to be 100% inclusive 100% of the time, a good faith effort should be made, such as referring to the LGBTQ community. Also, don't pluralize as "LGBTQs"; it should be used as an adjective.	LGBTQ [or other groups specifically being addressed in your writing]
preferred pronouns	When discussions about pronoun use began in earnest, we saw a rise of "preferred pronouns" in use as a way to signal to others that one was open to their pronouns. Now that this conversation has evolved, many people object to this phrase, as the term "preferred" suggests that their gender identity is a choice, rather than a part of their being.	pronouns [that is, using the term 'pronouns' without any qualifying description]
hermaphrodite / *hermaphroditic*	The term "hermaphrodite" is not very common in everyday language today, though it is possible you may encounter it in historical sources or among older generations to describe what would now be termed intersex people. It is considered an obsolete and offensive medical term. The term "hermaphrodite" was actually never linguistically or scientifically accurate, as "hermaphroditism" is a term originating in the being Hermaphroditus from Greek mythology, who had both female and male genitalia, whereas the sex characteristics of intersex people may or may not present physically.	intersex people

Race, Ethnicity, and Religion

Term/Phrase	How is it misused? What does it imply?	What should I use instead?
the blacks *the* Jews *the* Hispanics *the* natives *the* gays (etc.)	Using the definite article "the" before a group of people takes a particular attitude/stance towards them that implies one group acts and thinks the same, generalizing diverse communities in a way that creates an "us" vs. "them" rhetoric. Using "the" is a kind of othering that alienates large groups of people and is often used to convey prejudiced ideas.	Remove "the," and then consider whether the way you are generalizing is truly representative of that group.
Islamics Judaics	"Islamics" and "Judaics" are not grammatically correct terms and are often used in anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish rhetoric.	Muslims, Jewish people
Judeo-Christian	Judeo-Christian is a term popularized in the mid 20th century as a way to indicate shared values between Christianity and Judaism (primarily for political purposes, such as demonstrating a united ethical and moral front against communism). Though one may still hear this term, it is rejected by many not only because it has been used in exclusionary ways towards other communities (such as Muslims) but also because it ignores significant differences between Jewish and Christian values.	Be specific in referring to the community and their beliefs/attitudes when writing about them. Even among what we consider to be "Christian," "Jewish," "Muslim," or other categories of practice there can be great differences of thought.
people of Jewish faith	Some Jewish people prefer not to have their practices identified as a "faith," seeing faith as a Christian concept that imposes how religion works upon Judaism while reinforcing discriminatory views of Judaism as only a religion and not also a people.	Jewish people
racialized	While the term "racialized" in and of itself is a legitimate term that refers to a complex (and sometimes contradictory) process whereby a specific group becomes associated with or designated as a particular "race," typically along with forms of discrimination or marginalization, one should be cautious about how they use this language. The most common issue that arises is using "racialized" as a stand-in term for "non-White" or "people of color," which suggests that white people are somehow "raceless" and that this state is the default or "normal," thus reinforcing the othering of marginalized groups.	If you are describing an actual situation or process whereby a group is being racialized, then the term may be able to be used without stigma. If the use is simply a stand-in for "non-White" or similar terms, then reconsider what you mean to say and whether or not another term like POC is more accurate.
colored, negro/a, n***er	Although terms such as "colored," "negro/a," etc. were once considered acceptable terms for black people, they were eventually phased out in the 1960s because of their strong associations with the painful past experienced by black people in the United States. They are now seen as offensive and outdated terms.	African American, black (or Black), person of color (more generally), or identify a person from their country of origin or descent You may see people use "Black" (with a capital B) while not doing the same for "white." Some consider this a way to center and empower the people about which they are writing,

		particularly if they are a marginalized group. It is worth noting that there are many different contexts for Black identity (as with Indigenous and Aboriginal identities), and so it is important to research how language is used within those circumstances. See, for example, this primer on the Australian content: https://www.smh.com.au/national/black-black-blackfulla-language-is-important-but-it-can-be-tricky-20210826-p58lzg.html
Hispanic, Latino/a, Spanish	These terms are often used interchangeably, but they actually mean different things! "Latino/a" (sometimes Latin@) is a broad ethnic designation that refers to people who live in or emigrated from areas colonized in by people from the Iberian peninsula, a geographical area now known as Latin America. The preferred terminology is also now "Latinx," because the o/a are gendered word endings and "x" makes it gender-neutral. The term "Latinx" is most often used by and for people living in the United States, rather than those living in Latin America. "Hispanic" is a more narrow ethnic category that refers to people who were colonized by the Spanish and primarily use the Spanish language. *But remember not every country in Latin America primarily speaks Spanish (such as Brazilians, who speak Portuguese).* "Spanish" refers either to people from Spain, or the language Spanish. So you wouldn't call someone from Mexico, for example, "Spanish," though they might be Spanish-speaking. "Chicano/a" is a reference used for people of Mexican descent. It also appears in the context of social and political civil rights movements at their height in between the 1940s and 1970s that were centered on Mexican American identity. "Latinx" is not a racial category, but an ethnic category. Although many Latinx countries have national narratives of *mestizaje* (the mix of European and Indigenous people), not all Latinx people are the result of that mix. If you think of "Latinx" in racial terms, you overlook the diversity of people who fall under this category, assuming that those who don't look "indigenous" are not included, such as Afrolatinx people.	Hispanic, for language reference Spanish for appropriate geographic or language reference Chicano/a, for reference to people of Mexican descent Latinx, for geographic reference

	In some regions and communities, the term “Latine” has begun to be used over “Latinx,” as the “-e” suffix is already a gender-neutral form in Spanish and sounds more natural. It is also worth noting that some people whom one might label as “Latinx” do not use the term to describe themselves and consider it a more external label.	
Indians, Injuns	“Indian” is a term that emerged from naming practices of the European colonists who came to the Americas, beginning with Columbus, who erroneously believed he had landed in the Indies. It is considered offensive. However, it’s important to note that some indigenous groups *do* prefer the term “Indian,” and so it is important to be specific where possible and use what that community prefers as an identifier, rather than making assumptions.	“Indigenous peoples” is considered a safe general term for many different groups. “Amerindian” can be used to refer to indigenous people from North and South America. Some groups in North America have also adopted the term “American Indian”(sometimes shortened to “NDN”). But depending on the area, there are specific preferred terms: In the United States region, “Native American” is often used, and for indigenous people of the Alaska region, “Alaska Natives.” In Canada, “First Nations” or “Indigenous” are often used for indigenous peoples not including the Inuit and Métis, who have distinct identities. “First Peoples” broadly includes them. When possible, it is preferable to be specific about which group you are referring to, as there are distinct differences to each group (cultural, linguistic, historical, etc.). For a guide to Indigenous terms from a Canadian institution, see: https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/
Eskimo	Many people in parts of the Arctic consider Eskimo to be a derogatory term because of its historic use by racist colonizers. For some, the preferred term is “Inuit” (which generally means “people”), but there is no consensus, as some native Alaskans, who do not necessarily have linguistic connections to Inuit, still refer to themselves as Eskimos. Some Alaska Natives prefer “Inupiaq” or “Yupik,” which are the names that originate in their own languages	Inuit; Inupiaq; Yupik (confirm what the preferred name is among the groups you are discussing, rather than making assumptions or generalizing about them all as one category of peoples)

Caucasian	The term “caucasian” is used to designate whiteness constantly in media, scholarship, and even online surveys, but has very racist origins. A German philosopher from the 1700s theorized that people from the Caucasus region (countries like Georgia, Turkey, Russia, Armenia, etc.) had the “whitest” and therefore best skin, with others being more “animal-like.” He then theorized all Europeans descended from Georgians and were part of the same, white race. He created other racist “scientific” categorizations of people he felt were “degenerate forms of God’s original creation,” labeling them yellow, brown, red, and black. Because the term “Caucasian” became a part of legal vocabulary, it has persisted in our language today despite these terrible origins, and should be avoided whenever possible.	white white people
Japs, spics, and other slurs	Some racial, ethnic, or religious slurs may not be as obvious to you when you encounter them, particularly when they are used in historical writing, but it is important to be aware of these terms. If it is appropriate to use them in your papers, be sure they are contextualized properly and accompanied by quotations “ ” to demonstrate this is not your own use of the term, but that of the historical actor whom you are discussing.	[quotations and context necessary]
gypsy	Although popular culture has adopted the term “gypsy,” often to refer to nomadic people, it is in fact a slur and should not be used. This is likely the origin of the term “gyp,” as in “That market vendor totally gypped me.” So “gyp” should be avoided as well.	If referring to nomadic people, then “nomad.” If referring to the ethnic group, then Romani, Rom/Roma.
Polack	Although “Polack” is an Anglicization of the Polish masculine adjective *Polak*, which means a Polish male or a person of Polish ethnicity, it became a loanword used as an ethnic slur towards Polish immigrants, and should not be used today.	Pole, Polish person
African people Asian people Hispanic/Latino people [and other generalizations]	When paper writing or in everyday life, it is often tempting to speak general ways, but using terms like “African people,” “Asian people,” etc. implies that everyone from a particular content or cultural heritage all think, act, or practice culture in the same way. Would we say “North American people”?	the specific terms for that country or culture
oriental	"Oriental" or "the Orient" is a term that has long been used to refer in a general way to non-Western (American, European) cultures in a way that divides the world into "the West" and "the rest." These became catch-all terms to refer to people of Asian descent, often in order to discriminate against immigrants as less-than or exoticize their various cultures. The term not only reinforces harmful Eurocentric stereotypes, but essentializes all Asian people as the ethnically/culturally/racially the same. They have also been used to assert that people from Asian cultures are forever foreign or outsiders, regardless of their birthplace. Over the years, these ideas have been used	the specific terms for that country or culture

	to justify immigration exclusion, violence, racism, and political disenfranchisement.	
hillbilly, redneck, hick	These terms are slurs against people who live in the rural, mountainous areas of the United States (such as the Appalachia and the Ozarks), but have been more broadly used to refer to rural people in a derogatory manner as being of low income, low intelligence, resistant to modern society, and generally violent. These are offensive generalizations and assumptions and should not be used.	If used in a historical sense (from language in a source), use quotations to indicate the language is not your opinion. If you are discussing some aspect of people from rural areas, use specific language without the use of slurs. Is your discussion about people living in the Ozarks? Low-income individuals living in rural areas?
backward, barbaric, savage, primitive, uncivilized, wild	In the past, historical and scientific writings have used terms such as “barbaric” or “uncivilized” to describe societies or cultures they consider inherently inferior, making assumptions about intelligence and level of sophistication without considering those groups in their own terms.	Be specific about the idea you are trying to convey. Is it accurate or useful to make a judgment about the level of “development” or “civilization”? What other phrases or words might be used to describe your point? If this is someone else’s language, use quotations.
third-world, underdeveloped, poor	Terms such as “third-world” and “underdeveloped” have also been hotly debated topics for the same reasons as those above, particularly because they are often used by companies or government organizations to classify parts of the world. Labeling parts of the world as in levels of "development" can be tricky because different sources of information incorporate different measures and sources of data that can also use anachronistic terms. The term “third-world” itself comes from an outdated model of global categories from around the mid-20th century. For example, the Population Reference Bureau uses or used "More/Less Developed Countries" as their categories which some people find problematic. The United Nations Development Programme uses the Human Development Index, which also uses terminology some people have issues with. No one statistics or figure is perfect, it really depends on what you're comparing, and nothing really captures the variety of situations one may encounter in any country, the US included.	Think about the way you frame these terms if you do use them. For example, while it is technically correct to say, "On average, black Americans are poorer than white Americans," if you put it that way, you're implicitly stating that being poor is a function of being black. Compare that to "Black Americans experience poverty at higher rates than White Americans." By putting it in the context of "experiencing" something, you're implying that this is something that has more reasons and circumstances to consider, might be out of an individual's control, and is subject to some broader set of rules. Talking about countries can be the same. Instead saying a country "is poor" or "is underdeveloped", framing it as something "experienced" or "subjected to" implies that this is not necessarily entirely of their own making.
illegals	People can’t be illegal (For example, if you broke a traffic law, would you be an illegal?). This is a term often used to criminalize people based on their immigration status, or their racial or ethnic identity more broadly.	undocumented
prisoner, inmate, felon, convict	There is a lot of debate surrounding how to describe incarcerated peoples, even among the incarcerated community, and they should be considered carefully.	incarcerated person, or the preferred term in use by the individual

	On a technical level: There is often a distinction between a “prisoner” being a person in a federal or state prison, vs. an “inmate” being someone in a local jail or detention center. A felon is someone convicted of a felony (a crime of high seriousness, typically involving violence). A convict is a person found guilty of a criminal offense who is serving a sentence of imprisonment. *On a personal level:* Many of these terms are considered to be dehumanizing and to broadly generalize about one’s guilt or character. However, some people identify as or use the term “prisoner” because they feel it reflects how people are actually treated in carceral contexts.	
nomads	The use of nomad is tricky and not always offensive. In some disciplines, it is preferable to label pastoral groups that moved around as “mobile-pastoralists” to distinguish mobility for the sake of moving and/or stereotyped images of “barbarian” nomads. However, other disciplines (such as anthropology) frequently use “nomad” because its meaning is more specific than “mobile-[noun].” That said, recent terms such as “digital nomad” in the tech industry to describe people who are remote workers (primarily though not exclusively wealthy white men) have been seen as offensive for appropriating the word in an orientalizing and exoticizing fashion (similar to using “Gypsy”).	Consider the context in which the term is being used and select an appropriate descriptor.
Hawaii, New Zealand, Easter Island	Certainly, these terms are less blatantly offensive than a lot on the list, but while we are thinking about the language that we use, it can be nice to raise the idea in the classroom, and in our writing, of going out of our way to use the Native names for places, people, and things from Native cultures. By all means, if you’re talking about the State of Hawaii or the country of New Zealand in a political sense, use those terms. But if the context allows, contributing to the normalization and knowledge of placenames like Hawai‘i (spelled correctly with an ‘okina, not an apostrophe) and Aotearoa (the Māori name for New Zealand) can be a best practice.	Hawai'i; Aotearoa; Rapa Nui. Further examples include Haudenosaunee instead of Iroquois (from French, or unknown origin) and Diné instead of Navajo (from Spanish). Consult what sources you can to see what terms members of that Nation are using themselves, and/or what terms seem standard in the latest work in Indigenous Studies.

Medicine, Mental State, the Body

Term/Phrase	How is it misused? What does it imply?	What should I use instead?
crazy, insane, mad	Depending on the context, calling someone or something "crazy" or "insane" can be considered insensitive to mental illness. By using these terms, you suggest people are somehow deviant or that you trivialize their mental illness. On the term "mad": there is an emerging field of "mad studies" that is reclaiming the use of this term in connection with critical disability studies and explorations of mental illness and neuroatypicality.	Do you actually mean something is unusual or unbelievable? Spice up your language with something more appropriate: bananas! wonky! outrageous! unbelievable! ridiculous! etc. Do you actually mean that someone is mentally ill? Be specific about the proper terminology that should be used and sensitive to whether or not you're imposing your own judgment in the writing or if this is a term being intentionally used by the individual or community. If quoting a source that uses these terms, include quotes to indicate it is not your own language.
retard, retarded, moron, imbecile	Words like retarded, moron, and imbecile have their roots in medical and psychological history. For example, in a 1909 pediatric journal the word was used in a clinical context as "backwards" and "those subnormally endowed in respect to mental gifts . . . " Since then, it has evolved into a slur to mean anyone who is "stupid," "dumb," or basically, "not normal." In a clinical sense, these words are scientifically inaccurate and lack precision. They are also insensitive and hurtful to people with intellectual disabilities.	mentally disabled Intellectually disabled
special needs	Although this term came into use with good intentions of being sensitive in one's language, it has become co-opted as an insult with great stigma. The term "neurodiversity" and "neurodivergence" are now regularly in use to emphasize that all brains and nervous systems are diverse in how they operate and to avoid discriminatory language in connection with people with learning, cognitive, or mental health disabilities.	neurodiverse, neurodivergent
lame, handicapped, crippled	See above explanation for "retard." Take note that the term "crippled" (and its associated slang, "crip") is currently being reclaimed by disabled people. Disability rights movements in the 60s and 70s encouraged disabled people to free themselves of societally-imposed feelings of shame or being less-than, and in academia there are now bodies of scholarship on "crip theory."	disabled (or the term preferred by the writer/people under discussion, e.g. crip theory usage)
Person First vs. disability first language	Students should be aware of the debate over person first vs. identity first. Some people prefer to use "person first" language (person with autism) because it prioritizes their	If discussing a person you can ask, ask their preferred way to referring

(For example, autistic people or person with autism?)	personhood over their disability. Others prefer their disability first (autistic person) because they argue that their disability is an inherent part of their person and it is nothing to be ashamed of. This is a very contentious and ongoing debate.	to themselves. If not, look to the language in your sources and err on the side of being respectful. Great link discussing the issue: http://ncdj.org/2016/01/journalists-should-learn-to-carefully-traverse-a-variety-of-disability-terminology/
"suffering from" "confined to" (phrases that assume hardship)	It is important to be aware of how you are imposing your own assumptions about a disability, disease, etc. onto the language that you use. For example, phrases that assume hardship on the part of the individual can be considered offensive, such as "*confined* to a wheelchair" or "*suffering* from AIDS." These descriptions impose your own (stigmatizing) conclusions about the value or quality of life someone is living.	be cognizant of how the language you are using--is it unnecessarily negative? does it make personal assumptions that the person you are describing would not themselves use?
abuse	"Abuse" by definition is cruel or violent treatment, but especially refers to systematic/continued forms of violence, whether physical, emotional, or verbal. When events or actions offend us, we tend to use hyperbolic language, exaggerating to describe our own strong, negative reaction to what happened. However, using the term "abuse" lightly, especially when referring to personal relationships, can trivialize serious trauma people have endured. While it makes sense to indicate that a lawmaker "abused his power," or that domestic violence qualifies as "abuse," to say that your significant other not returning your calls after a fight is "abuse" because it's so hurtful may misrepresent the actions being done and offend people who have suffered very serious forms of abuse.	Ask yourself why you characterize what you're seeing as "abuse" and if it's appropriate. If it is, then use "abuse." If it's not, is there another term that might work better? mistreatment? wrongdoing? insult? injury?
addict, substance abuser, drug abuser, junkie former addict, reformed addict	Many health care professionals are shifting the language they use to describe issues related to addiction in order to remove stigma and employ person-first terminology. The stigma and discrimination associated with these conditions are often rooted in older, inaccurate beliefs (such as addition being a moral or individual failing) and discourage people from seeking treatment. In the case of terms like "addict," "abuser," "junkie," etc., these terms elicit negative and punitive images that suggest a person *is* the problem rather than a person *has* a problem. It helps to be cognizant of what stereotypes we reinforce based on the language we use.	patient, person with substance use disorder, person who misuses X, person who engages in unhealthy/hazardous X use person in recovery/long term recovery, person who previously used drugs/alcohol For more insights into drug and alcohol language and stigma, visit: https://nida.nih.gov/nidamed-medical-health-professionals/health-professions-education/words-matter-terms-to-use-avoid-when-talking-about-addiction
(drug/ substance) abuse (drug) habit	As explained above, terms like "abuse" or "habit" are associated with personal or societal negative judgments of or punitive attitudes towards the individual and can minimize the seriousness of chronic diseases. For illicit drugs, "use" is a more neutral term, while prescription medications (which are prescribed by a doctor for a particular kind of use) may be referred to as	*For illicit drugs:* use *For prescription medications:* misuse, use other than prescribed *For "habit":* substance use disorder drug addiction

	being “misused.” To refer to these as “habits” can undermine the seriousness of the disease and inaccurate suggest that the person can choose to stop, oversimplifying the complex issues underlying the use of illicit drugs or misuse of prescribed drugs.	
homeless	Housing insecurity is experienced by many kinds of people. Advocates have recently turned away from “homeless,” seeing it as a term that flattens the experiences of those without a permanent residence and carries with it many implicit, derogatory connotations that can be dehumanizing. Many also wish to draw distinctions between a “house” (a physical location) and a “home” (a broader, more abstract term that can refer to a sense of community, group, or location in which one feels comfortable). Furthermore, using terms like “unhoused” or “unsheltered” can help to clarify that all peoples should be housed in the first place, centering issues of societal and infrastructural failings rather than suggesting that to not have a physical house is a personal or moral failure on the part of an individual. In some cases, this may be described with person-first language such as “a person experiencing homelessness.”	unhoused, houseless, unsheltered

Time, Place

Term/Phrase	What does it imply? How is it misused?	What should I use instead?
ancient, medieval	When writing, “ancient” and “medieval” are often exaggerated to mean anything really old. (“That sweater looks ancient!”) But in history, terms like “ancient,” “classical,” and “medieval” are used to distinguish particular (although debated) time periods.So be careful, you might accidentally suggest something is very Greco-Roman or Carolingian without meaning to.	If referring to a particular time period or era, figure out what the terminology is for the field you’re working in. For example, in medieval European studies, many people consider the “medieval period” to be 450-1453, whereas in medieval Japanese studies, the “medieval period” is 1185-1603. Periodization is still debated amongst scholars, even in the same field. If you just mean “old,” then find the appropriate descriptor (is it *actually* “ancient”? Probably not. dated? worn? aged? run down?).
medieval, feudal, Dark Ages	Using the terms “medieval,” “feudal,” or “Dark Ages” has become a common way to call something “backwards” or “primitive” (just think about Samuel L. Jackson claiming he’s “going to go medieval on your a**” or statements in the news that certain proposed laws will take us back to the “Dark Ages”). However, in historical writing these terms have very specific meanings relative to their time periods, and scholarship also pushes back sharply against the idea that the medieval period was “dark” or somehow pre-progress.	Ask yourself what you really want to convey when you want to use these terms, and be specific about meaning. Are you falling into presentist, biased traps, trying to call something “barbaric” or “primitive”? (see the above section on race, ethnicity, and religion)
isolated	Many schools teach history using a narrative of “discovery.” The Age of Exploration and The Age of Discovery are frequently told from Eurocentric points of views, in which colonial empires go out into the world and “discover” otherwise “barbaric” people and “bring them civilization.” Taking this perspective trivializes the history and culture of other societies and assumes Western cultures were and are inherently superior. A part of this narrative is the assumption that many of these areas were “isolated.” The implication there is “isolated from civilization” (meaning Western powers. However, many non-Western areas maintained global empires and extensive land-based and overseas trade networks long before encounters with European kingdoms or explorers. The term “isolated” has insulting, ethnocentric implications.	Examine what you mean by “isolated.” Is it simply “had little to no contact with X”? Did those countries or societies have other, local interactions that you have thought about and accounted for?
America, Americans	People from the United States tend to refer to themselves in everyday speech as “Americans” without considering the fact that “America” consists of both North and South America. Consider that the word “*americanos*” refers to people from any of the Americas and there is a separate	the United States people from the United States

	word to distinguish people from the U.S. In historical writing be cautious about specifying where you are referring to.	
nation, citizen	Especially when writing about premodern or cultural topics, it is often a habit to use modern terms familiar to us, such as “nation” or “citizen,” to refer to members of a particular group or area. These terms should be used with caution, however, as they project assumptions that the subject is part of a modern nation-state and has formalized representation as a citizen, which was often not the case. If you’re not sure how to describe the relationship you’re writing about, ask!	state, government [as appropriate] member, participant, inhabitant, resident, subject [as appropriate]
“lacking history”	We often equate “history” or “civilization” with “written history,” but this is not so! History encompasses the time before and after the written word, including both pre-writing societies and societies that operated through predominantly oral practices. The use or non-use of writing does not indicate a lack of sophistication.	Examine what you mean by “lacking history”-- what do you mean to say? Are you making assumptions about the sophistication of a society based on its time or historical practices? Be specific and thoughtful about your words based on the context of your topic.