Introduction

This document serves as the style guide for the William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice (RGSJ). It is intended for use by both authors and Journal staff. This guide is by no means exclusive nor exhaustive. The topics raised in this style guide are those on which the Journal regularly publishes. We invite authors to adopt these conventions, but where a particular convention does not fit with an author’s intended use, we ask the author to discuss it with the Editor-in-Chief.

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General Rules

Primarily, this style guide focuses on the language used when addressing various identities. The mission of this style guide is to update language used in RGSJ publications. The Journal recognizes that identity is inherently personal and may be complicated. Hopefully, in seeing why the Journal selected any particular convention, the style guide will foster a dialogue that ultimately advances the collective mission toward inclusion, respect, and social justice. The RGSJ style guide does not set ‘hard and fast’ rules, and we will revise it regularly as we continue to learn and grow.

For questions about grammar conventions or other publication standards, please visit the RGSJ website https://wmpeople.wm.edu/site/page/wmjowl/home or feel free to email us at jrgsj@email.wm.edu.
Editing Quotations

Not infrequently, articles quote sources that use terms that we now consider dated or offensive. Authors may consider substituting an inappropriate term with another. Generally, RGSJ will leave it to the author’s judgment whether to edit the language in a quotation because the language in the quotation may serve an argumentative purpose. RGSJ does ask authors to be aware of the instances in which a change to the language in a quotation is particularly appropriate to advance a community’s acceptance or present a story with the appropriate respect (for example, recognizing trans folks’ name changes).

If, at any point, the unedited language is unclear because of the use of other conventions elsewhere in the article, please include a footnote that explains why the language has been replaced.

Geopolitics/Global Economic Diversity

Please use terms that describe, rather than label when discussing international development, political changes, and social statuses. Specifically, avoid terms that ignore colonialism, over-generalize, or may be misleading. For example, instead of “Third World,” substitute a descriptor such as “low-income economy,” which the World Bank uses to classify countries based on economic status. For additional guidance on terms to use or avoid for particular regions, refer to The Diversity Style Guide.

Similarly, be sure to distinguish between the actions of a government or government actor, and the people living within the country. The actions of one may not be imputable to the other, and overly-general language can create stereotypes.

Individuals and Communities

Race and Ethnicity

RGSJ recognizes that race is a social construct that has resulted in discrimination and marginalization of certain communities throughout history, particularly in the United States. In 2020, many publications revised their style guides to reflect this historic oppression. After reviewing the analysis in The Atlantic, the Associated Press and the New York Times decisions, and the style guides and handbooks from the National Association of Black Journalists, the Asian American Journalist Association, National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Native American Journalists Newsroom, and the American Psychological Association, RGSJ has adopted the following conventions. Other news, research, and social commentary pieces also informed the decisions.

1. Please capitalize the first letter of any historically marginalized community’s identity, including “Brown.” RGSJ does not capitalize the “w” in “white” because white supremacists
often capitalize the “w” to signify superiority.¹ Rather, *RGSJ* opts to capitalize the first letter of historically marginalized identities to offset and promote them.

2. In general, please use identity terms that the person or community about which the article is referring identifies with themselves. Please also be as specific as possible, to avoid overgeneralization or stereotyping. Always write with empathy, respect, and inclusion in mind. If unsure, please refer to the following for guidance.

   a. Please honor and respect diaspora relationships. For example, do not treat “Black” or “African” as synonyms for “African-American.” Please consider editing terms in quotations from past judicial decisions unless serving a specific argumentative purpose. For further guidance, please see the National Association of Black Journalists’ style guide, available at [https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide](https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide).

   b. When discussing Native populations, please honor tribal names and do not anglicize them unless the tribe or nation uses those names themselves. Additionally, please use contemporary examples and avoid generalization and stereotypes. In the United States, American Indian, Indian, Native American, and Native are all used interchangeably, and all may be acceptable. Use the term that the community the article refers to most prefers. For example, in Virginia, when identifying themselves collectively, members of area tribes identify as “Virginia Indians.”² For more guidance on terminology and tribal nations, please see the resources available from the National Museum of the American Indian, available at [https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/impact-words-tips](https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/impact-words-tips).

   c. *RGSJ* uses “Latinx” when broadly describing communities of Latin American descent. The term should not be used if describing a group for which the gender is known, because of the gender-assigning properties in Spanish and Portuguese. “Latino” should be used to describe anyone who identifies as male, including groups of male-identifying folks and those who identify male but were not assigned male at birth. Similarly, the term “Latina” should be used to describe to describe anyone who identifies as female, including groups of female-identifying folks and those who identify female but were not assigned female at birth. *RGSJ* recognizes that “Latinx” is not common usage among communities of Latin American origin, because it is an English-language term. For more information about the debate over the use of “Latinx,” see Jose A. Del Real, ‘Latinx’ Hasn’t Even Caught on Among Latinos. It Never Will., WASH. POST (Dec. 18, 2020, 10:31 a.m.), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/latexx-latinos-unpopular-gender-term/2020/12/18/bf177c5e-3b41-11eb-9276-ae0ca72729be_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/latexx-latinos-unpopular-gender-term/2020/12/18/bf177c5e-3b41-11eb-9276-ae0ca72729be_story.html).

   d. When discussing communities originating from Asia, please avoid anglicizing community identities, unless they are accepted by the community which the article references. In addition, do not treat “Asian,” “Asian-American,” and a person’s national identity, such as “Japanese,” as synonyms. For more specific guidance,


**Religion**

When discussing religion, use the terms and conventions of the sect. Be respectful of the various spiritual beliefs and practices across the world. If unsure about what terms to use, reference the Religion Stylebook, available at https://religionstylebook.com/.

**Gender**

After considering guidance set by the Radical Copy Editor, GLAAD, the United Nations, and the considerations from the Washington Post, RGSJ has adopted the following conventions:

1. Always use a person’s chosen name.
   a. Do not use a former name without prior permission, even if talking about the person in the past.
   b. Do not place a chosen name in quotation marks.
2. Always use the pronouns with which the person or group identifies, whatever they may be.
   a. Do not use former pronouns without prior permission, even if talking about the person in the past.
   b. Pronouns are not “preferred.”
3. If the pronouns of a person are unknown, please use the singular they. Read more about they in the Oxford English Dictionary. Sometimes, one may be appropriate as well.
4. Use of particular terms:
   a. Transgender is an adjective, not a noun and usually, not a gender. As such, examples of appropriate descriptors include trans woman or trans man.
   b. Transgender is NOT a sexual orientation. Instead, use gender, gender identity, or gender identity and expression.
   c. Transition describes the social and/or medical process of publicly living one’s gender identity. AVOID terms such as transgerndering, preoperational, sex change, the surgery, became a woman/man/non-binary, changed genders. Instead, use the term transition or gender-affirming surgery.
   d. Transgender also includes those who identify as non-binary.
   e. Gender non-conforming people’s gender expressions (clothing, mannerisms, roles, other behaviors) do not conform to stereotypical gender expectations. A non-binary person’s sense of self is not exclusively woman/female or man/male. They are NOT synonyms.
5. Do not disclose gender history without prior consent.
6. Avoid using unnecessarily gendered terminology. For example, instead of saying “fireman,” use “firefighter.”
Please reference this table, adapted from the guidance in the *Radical Copy Editor Style Guide*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Use Instead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth gender/sex, born a woman, born a man, biologically/genetically</td>
<td>Birth-assigned sex, sex assigned at birth, assigned female/male at birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male/female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgenderism, gender disordered, gender identity disorder</td>
<td>Transgender, gender dysphoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secret, disguised, fooled, no one knew the truth, the lie</td>
<td>History, past, private, nondisclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Avoid any language that makes it seem that a trans person is deceptive for</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>living their authentic selves.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His or her</td>
<td>Their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Recognize that there are more than two genders, and avoid posing a binary.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to the physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction a person feels toward the same and/or opposite sex. It is distinct from a person’s gender identity. After reviewing the [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](https://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq) and the [Association of LGBTQ Journalists style book](https://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq), RGSJ adopted the following conventions.

1. Always use the identity with which the person or community the article references identifies.
2. LGBTQ+ is preferred form of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer acronym. It does not substitute for individual identities, but should be used to reflect diversity of sexual orientations where appropriate. **Note:** Transgender is not a sexual orientation.
3. Avoid using -phobia terms (e.g., *homophobia, biphobia*). Instead, use *intolerance, bias, or prejudice.*
4. If referencing someone who self-identifies as LGBTQ+ in their personal/public lives, use *out*. Avoid *openly gay, openly bisexual*, etc. For example: John, an out gay man, sometimes faces discrimination from his colleagues at work.
5. Avoid *homosexual couple or homosexual relationship*. Instead, use couple or relationship. If necessary, use gay/lesbian/same-sex couple.
6. Do not use the term *sexual preference*. That implies that sexual orientation is a choice and is alterable. Instead, use *sexual orientation* to accurately represent an individual’s enduring attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex.

**Disability**

When discussing disability, avoid language that victimizes. For example, instead of “Jessica suffers from cerebral palsy,” use “Jessica lives with cerebral palsy.” As with all issues, avoid language that generalizes or stereotypes. Disability is hugely diverse in terms of the disability itself and the people who live with those disabilities. After considering the Stanford Disability Language Guide and the Center for Disability Rights Disability Writing & Journalism Guidelines, RGSJ follows the below conventions.

1. **Do not use** euphemisms for disability (e.g., “differently abled”, “handi-capable”, “special”, etc.)
2. **Understand and be intentional** about the use of person-first versus identity-first language:
   a. **Person-first language**: person-first language places the person before the disability (e.g., “person with a disability” or “person with dyslexia”). Many people have learned that this is the best way to address disability because it separates the person from the disability, reducing the dehumanization of disability.
   b. **Identity-first language**: identity-first language links the person and the disability (e.g., “disabled person” or “autistic”). This style is used to celebrate disability pride and identity.
   c. **Always** use the convention with which the individual or community the article references identifies.
   d. Use of identity-first language has increased recently, particularly among disability activists. Sometimes its use is disability-specific. For example, there is a substantial #ActuallyAutistic movement, while many people prefer that language surrounding mental health follows the person-first convention.
3. When referencing people who do not have disabilities, use either “non-disabled” or “person/people without a disability,” consistent with the use of either identity- or person-first language. Do not use terms such as “healthy,” “normal,” or “able-bodied.”
4. Keep in mind that not all disabilities are illnesses. **Do not** assume that a disability requires medical treatment.

For more information, or for recommendations on specific terminology to use when referencing specific disabilities, see the Stanford Disability Language Guide and the Center for Disability Rights Disability Writing & Journalism Guidelines.

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**Aging**

When referring to aging adults, do not make assumptions about their abilities or generalize about the population. Similarly, try to be specific about what part of the population is relevant to the discussion (e.g., adults sixty-five and older, or adults eighty and older).

Consider the terms used and whether they accurately describe the population or person relevant in the article. For example, many people would not describe themselves as “senior” or “elderly.” For additional guidance on language to use when discussing aging adults, see *Media Takes: On Aging from the International Longevity Center*, particularly pages 27–29, and the APA Guide for Bias Free Language on Age.

**Incarceration**

When discussing incarceration and people in prison, use person-first language. Following the guidance of the *Marshall Project*, *RGSJ* has adopted its guidelines in full, represented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Use Instead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inmates or convicts</td>
<td>people in prison, people jailed in X facility, held/detained in X jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felon, offender, sex offender, offense, parolee, and probationer</td>
<td>Convicted of X, John Doe is registered as a sex offender in X state, John Doe is on probation, John Doe is on parole</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because prisoner generally conveys a physical state rather than an identity, that term is still used.

**Immigration/Migration**

Always center the humanity of a person. Do not make generalizations, mislead, or stereotype. Be specific where possible. Do not use “illegal” to describe people. The term should only be used to describe actions. *RGSJ* adopts the *Race Forward Journalist Style Guide for Covering Immigration*, represented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Use Instead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigrant, illegal alien, illegals</td>
<td>Undocumented, undocumented migrant, undocumented immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal worker</td>
<td>Undocumented worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented alien</td>
<td>Undocumented immigrant, immigrant seeking status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Socioeconomic/Occupational Status**

Always write with respect, empathy, and avoiding generalizations and stereotypes. Sometimes, the best way to do so, will be to use person-first language. Reference the APA Guide for Bias Free Language on Socioeconomic Status where relevant. Some more common examples are represented below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Use Instead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare mothers</td>
<td>Mothers who receive TANF benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless people</td>
<td>People experiencing homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low educated</td>
<td>People with [X]-level education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement gap</td>
<td>Opportunity gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitute</td>
<td>Sex worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acknowledgment**

The *Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice* thanks the students from other journals and student organizations at W&M Law School who spent part of their summers as a part of the review committee for this style guide. We also thank our journal advisor, Professor Vivian Hamilton for her advice and insights.