

# A Common DEI Language: Reference Guide

Updated 10/4/2021

*“It is critically important for every single one of us to study and come to understand racism in all of its manifestations...and part of that understanding is defining terms. The first step [to having conversations about race, racism and being anti-racist] is ensuring there is a common vocabulary. You can’t really talk about anything without a common language—those set definitions. The first step to [safe and productive] conversation is to define terms, so everyone can be on the same page.”*

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi

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At AMC, we are committed to building a shared diversity and inclusion language that serves as the foundation for having open, trusting and transparent conversations with our colleagues and with our teams. We want to ensure that members of the AMC community are equipped with the tools they need to speak inclusively and to keep current with the ever-evolving language associated with DEI. Our goal is not to tone police or to make sure everyone is being “politically correct.” Rather, our focus is on ensuring we treat one another with human decency, dignity and respect.

We encourage people to lead with courage, compassion and curiosity. We know we won’t always get it right, so we also know that we must learn to acknowledge our mistakes and apologize with humility and vulnerability. Language is constantly evolving; just as we adjust and adapt to other changes in language—such as all the ways in which we have integrated language about technology into our lexicon—be sure to approach learning DEI vocabulary with a growth mindset.

This document is a reference guide to find well-researched and vetted information and consider it to be a living document. We ask people to share their questions and feedback, so we can be responsive to folks’ needs ([AMCHR@outdoors.org](mailto:AMCHR@outdoors.org)).

This is a dense, ever-growing document. Revisit it. Come back to it again. Use it as an ongoing reference. To help with searching, please utilize the Table of Contents below. You may also want to use Ctrl F to search for words, phrases and terms.

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## Reflection Questions

It can be challenging to integrate new language and vocabulary, especially when we are worried about making mistakes or offending people. As you focus on having a growth mindset about adapting to new language, here are some reflection questions to hold close:

1. What have I learned in the past that makes me shy away from discomfort?
2. How do my upbringing, values and lived experiences inform how I think about diversity, inclusion and words/phrases that make me feel confused or uncomfortable?
3. How can I commit myself to taking steps to change my language? Who can help hold me accountable?
4. If I mess up, how can I forgive myself and ask forgiveness from others with grace and humility?
5. How can I build new habits around the new words and phrases I'm learning?

## Inclusive Language

We seek to speak inclusively and put people at the center of our language.

### INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE...

- Puts people first and never intentionally excludes people from a group
- Is free from words or phrases that explicitly or implicitly stereotype, discriminate or express prejudice
- Centers the wants and needs of people who have historically been and/or currently are excluded, marginalized and decentered by those in the majority
- Is defined by those who are marginalized

### USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE...

- Makes people who are typically marginalized feel included and valued
- Demonstrates respect for people's humanity and a belief in the value of inclusion of all
- Can help to build trust across lines of difference
- Requires an ongoing commitment to learning and evolving to support marginalized communities
- Means sometimes you'll still mess up and will need to apologize!

## Definitions

This list is ever-evolving and ever-growing. This is just a starting point, as we continue to build our shared and common D&I language.

**ALLYSHIP** requires action. It is an active and consistent practice of using your power and privilege to drive inclusion for all.

**ANTI-RACISM** is the conscious decision to identify and challenge racism on a daily basis. It requires ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection.

**BIPOC** stands for Black, Indigenous and other people of color.

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## **INCLUSIVE BEHAVIORS**

- Express curiosity
- Demonstrate compassion
- Act with intention

**DIVERSITY** is your individual differences, characteristics and experiences that make you unique and distinct. These characteristics are both:

- Inherent: what you are born with
- Acquired: influenced by the experiences you've had and the choices you've made

**INCLUSION** happens when everyone acts with intention to ensure that you can be the best version of yourself, you feel valued and that you belong, and you know you can thrive. A culture that is intentionally inclusive:

- Is safe
- Is accessible
- Affirms your individual social identities, experiences, contributions and perspectives
- Continuously adapts and responds, fostering ongoing learning and empathy

**INTERSECTIONALITY**, coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes how race, class, gender and other social identities “intersect” with one another; it is a lens through which you can see where privilege and power—or lack thereof—interlocks and intersects. Stated another way, it is the complex and cumulative way in which the impact of multiple forms of discrimination combine, overlap and/or intersect in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

**MARGINALIZED** means you are on the fringes of society, excluded or isolated due to the systems that uplift and/or grant access to resources to those who are in the majority and/or privileged groups.

**MICROAGGRESSIONS** are the everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs or insults—whether intentional or unintentional—that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages that target people solely based upon their marginalized group membership.

**PREJUDICE** is a judgment or belief that is formed on insufficient grounds before facts are known or in disregard of a facts that contradict that judgment or belief. We can learn and unlearn prejudices.

**PRIVILEGE** is a set of unearned benefits due to belonging to a specific social group, including race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., that are not afforded to other groups, such as white privilege.

**RACISM** is a prejudice against someone or a group of people based on race, and that prejudice is reinforced by systems of power. Racism operates at four levels:

- Structural/systemic
- Institutional
- Interpersonal
- Internalized

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**UNCONSCIOUS BIAS** refers to a bias that happens automatically, is outside of our control and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people, information and situations, influenced by our background, environment, and personal experiences. Unconscious biases often run contrary to our conscious beliefs.

**WHITE FRAGILITY**, coined by Robin DiAngelo, is the defensive reaction white people have when their ideas about race and racism are challenged. It is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves, [including] the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear and guilt.

## Questions You Might Have About Language

Language is imperfect, especially when we're talking about diversity and inclusion. Words and phrases and ideas related to DEI are ever-evolving, updating and adapting. The answers provided below are based on research and perspectives shared by the people most impacted by these words and definitions. What is considered "appropriate" or "correct" today could literally change and update tomorrow, so we are constantly checking ourselves and our research to make sure we're staying as current and up-to-date as possible.

That said, on an individual to individual basis, you should be checking to understand what language people prefer. Someone who is Black may prefer to be referred to as African American; while one person in the LGBTQIA+ community may prefer to use the word, "queer," someone else in the community may not. Respect people's individual choices.

We, like you, will make mistakes. That's OK. We're all striving to be better colleagues and people, and to be human is to be flawed. We ask for grace and feedback.

### GENERAL

Question	Answer
Is it OK to use "diverse" to describe a single person?	<p>"Diverse" means variety within a group. Therefore, one individual person, place, thing, etc. cannot be diverse – there is no such thing as a "diverse" person.</p> <p>"Diverse" is often used as a euphemism for "Black" or "person of color," but diverse is not a synonym for those phrases. You can have a <i>diverse group</i> of people, but a single person is not "diverse."</p>
What is the difference between "minority" and "marginalized" and "underrepresented," and what should I be saying?	<p>"Minority" refers to a small fraction of the population around race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc. It is the quantification of a group, and it is an out-dated, though still frequently used in media, term.</p>

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	<p>“Marginalized,” as noted above, refers to access to resources, and this is based on power and privilege.</p> <p>“Underrepresented” refers to a subset of a population that holds a smaller percentage within a significant subgroup than the subset holds in the general population.</p> <p>Minority and underrepresented refer to quantification.</p> <p>Instead of using “minority” as a noun, use “marginalized” as a verb when referring to a group or a person who is a part of a community that are not considered part of the group that has privilege.</p>
<p>What is cultural appropriation, and why is it a problem?</p>	<p>Cultural appropriation happens when someone in one community adopts an element or elements of another culture, and this can be particularly fraught and challenging when it is someone from a privileged background. This can feel like diminishing an entire culture and its significance down to a novelty or aesthetic.</p> <p>It isn’t about shaming anyone; rather, it’s about listening to the people from the culture you’re interested in and having genuine respect for and understanding of something that’s not your own. And, just remember – no one person speaks for the entire community, so even if one person thinks it’s OK, that doesn’t make it OK.</p>

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

Question	Answer
<p>Should I say, “African American” or “Black”?</p>	<p>Black; not every person who is Black is also African American.</p>
<p>Should I capitalize the “B” in Black?</p>	<p>Yes! In fact, the AP just changed its style guide to ensure the “B” is capitalized. According to the VP of standards for the Associated Press, “the lowercase black is a color, not a person.”</p>
<p>Do Latinx and Hispanic mean the same thing? And why do people say, “Latinx”?</p>	<p>People who are Latinx are from Latin America, and people who are Hispanic are from countries where Spanish is the primary language. You could be Latinx AND Hispanic, or one or the other, but they are not interchangeable terms.</p>

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	<p>Latinx is a non-binary phrase to encompass all genders.</p> <p>Oh, and Latinx and Hispanic are <i>ethnic</i> identities, not racial categories. So, you could be white AND Hispanic, or Black AND Latinx.</p>
What does URM stand for?	<p>Underrepresented minority; in tech and academic spaces, Black and Latinx people, as well as women, are considered URMs. The category of URM is based on population size, so, for example, people who are Asian are considered to be overrepresented in tech spaces because their population numbers tend to be higher than the US population numbers.</p>
How should I refer to Native Americans?	<p>Whenever possible, Native people prefer to be called by their specific tribal name. When speaking broadly, people tend to be OK with Native American, American Indian and Indigenous American.</p>
Are people from India considered Asian?	<p>Yes! Indian Americans fall within the very broad umbrella of Asian American.</p>
<p>“Redlining” is a term that describes the practice of completing every trail on a map, in a trail network or park, etc.</p> <p>“Redlining” also “refers to a discriminatory pattern of disinvestment and obstructive lending practices that act as an impediment to home ownership among African Americans and other people of color.” <a href="#">Learn More</a>.</p>	<p>This is a case of one word that can mean two very different things, but one of the uses evokes proactively racist and exclusionary practices. With that in mind, try ‘tracing the trails’.</p>
Should I use the term citizen science or citizen scientist? Some of our participants may not be citizens of the US.	<p>Community science is a more inclusive term that is more inclusive. Community scientist may also be used.</p>

## GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Question	Answer
What does LGBTQIA stand for?	<p>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (sometimes, the Q also stands for “questioning”) Intersex Asexual</p>
What does “cisgender” mean?	<p>Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.</p>

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<p>What does “transgender” mean?</p>	<p>Transgender refers to people for whom their gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.</p> <p>Please note, not everyone who is transgender goes through a medical transition.</p>
<p>What does “non-binary” mean?</p>	<p>Non-binary refers to gender falling outside of the categories of “man” and “woman”</p>
<p>What is “gender identity”?</p>	<p>Gender identity is one’s deeply held, internal sense of their gender.</p>
<p>What is “gender expression”?</p>	<p>Gender expression is how people express their gender identity outwardly through many vehicles, such as name, pronouns, clothing, etc.</p>
<p>I’ve noticed some people share their pronouns in their e-mail signatures or share them when introducing themselves. Why are they doing this?</p>	<p>Sometimes, we make assumptions about one’s gender based on a variety of cues, such as name and appearance. By proactively sharing our pronouns, we ensure that we are not misgendered and prevent people from making assumptions about us.</p> <p>Also, please note, it is outdated to say “preferred” pronouns. Saying “preferred” makes it seem like using someone’s pronouns is optional when, in reality, using a person’s pronouns is the most basic need they have to feel safe and to exist in public spaces.</p>
<p>I’ve heard people use “they/them/their/theirs” as singular. This is not what I grew up understanding!</p>	<p>That’s totally OK. Change is hard, but yes, “they/them/their/theirs” are singular pronouns, just like “he/him/his” and “she/her/hers.”</p>
<p>How do I ask someone their pronouns? I feel uncomfortable!</p>	<p>If you feel nervous asking someone their pronouns, try introducing yourself with your name and your pronouns. This may open up space for the other person to share. Or, you can just use “they/them/their/theirs” until they share their pronouns with you.</p>
<p>I heard that saying “guys” or “gals” is not inclusive. Why? What should I say instead?</p>	<p>These terms are not gender neutral and exclude people who do not identify with the gender binary.</p> <p>You can say, “folks,” “you all” and “everyone.”</p>
<p>I hear people keep referring to women as “females,” especially when they’re talking about demographics and data—is that OK?</p>	<p>The use of “female” can be seen as pejorative. “Female” is a scientific term referring to the sex of a species, whereas, “woman” refers specifically to female human beings.</p> <p>Additionally, not all women were assigned the female sex at birth, so conflating “female” with “woman” can erase people who are gender non-conforming and transgender.</p>

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Is it OK to say “queer”?	Some people within the LGBTQIA+ community have reclaimed “queer.” Once considered pejorative, some people within the community use queer as an overarching term that includes both gender identity and sexual orientation. That said, not everyone within the community has embraced or is OK with this term.
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## DISABILITIES

Question	Answer
Should I say, “disabled” or “special needs” or “differently abled”?	People with disabilities prefer the term “disabled.”
What does “person-first language” mean versus “identity-first language”?	Typically, guidance is that we use language that is “person-first” when speaking about people with disabilities. For example, a person with autism. However, within the community, some people prefer “identity-first language;” for example, autistic person.
What am I supposed to say instead of “handicapped”?	Please try out “accessible,” instead. For example, “accessible parking” or “accessible restroom.”
How do I ensure I’m being respectful when I speak about people with disabilities?	Focus on what people can do versus what they cannot. For example, instead of “wheelchair-bound,” say, “someone who uses a wheelchair.  Also, avoid language like “defect,” “invalid,” “victim” or “afflicted by.” Avoid using “normal” as the opposite of someone who has a disability.

## Common Words, Phrases, and Idioms to Avoid with Suggested Replacements

We know language evolves constantly, and we are not trying to control how people speak or what they say. Rather, we know that words and phrases that were at one time considered socially acceptable may evolve into no longer being appropriate. It’s important that we scrutinize our language and consider the origins of certain words, phrases, and idioms. Just because one person may be comfortable, doesn’t mean another person will be – and vice versa. What may be acceptable to people *within* a community, may not be acceptable if said or used by someone outside of the community, and we know that no community is a monolith, so people will disagree within the umbrella of a community. We acknowledge that this is hard and complicated! We offer the below as opportunities for you to interrogate meaning and for you to consider how you can work to be more inclusive of all experiences, identities, and perspectives.



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Harmful to...	You might be saying...	Try this instead...
Asians	Gung ho	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enthusiastic</li> <li>Excited</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guru (Buddhist and Hindu religions)</li> <li>Ninja (Japanese people)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialist</li> <li>Expert</li> <li>An authority</li> <li>An ace</li> </ul>
	Long time no see	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"It's been awhile!"</li> <li>"I haven't seen you in forever!"</li> </ul>
	No can do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I can't go for that!"</li> <li>"I can't do that for you."</li> </ul>
	Oriental	<i>This is considered a slur. Please do not refer to Asian people as "Oriental."</i>
The Black community	Grandfathered in... or Grandfathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exempt from the new rule... policy... etc.</li> <li>Excused</li> <li>Legacied in</li> </ul>
	Call a spade a spade	Tell it like it is
	Sold down the river	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Betrayed</li> <li>Cheated</li> </ul>
	Uppity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stuck-up</li> <li>Arrogant</li> <li>Conceited</li> </ul>
	Thug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bully</li> <li>Ruffian</li> </ul>
	Colored	<i>This is an outdated term that is no longer used to describe Black people or other people of color. Please do not use this word to describe BIPOC.</i>
	The peanut gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hecklers</li> <li>Critics</li> <li>"The rowdy ones"</li> <li>Squeaky wheel</li> </ul>
Mumbo jumbo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I couldn't understand them."</li> <li>"They were mumbling."</li> </ul>	
Indigenous people	Pow wow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting</li> <li>Check-in</li> <li>Stand-up</li> <li>Huddle</li> </ul>
	Tribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group</li> <li>Team</li> </ul>
	Low man on the totem pole	Lowest-ranking person; person with the least positional power
	Circle the wagons	Protect ourselves
	Hold down the fort	Keep things moving
	Eskimo	Inuit
	Off the reservation	Go rogue

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Indigenous People (cont.)	Scalped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ripped off</li> <li>▪ Robbed</li> <li>▪ Hustled</li> </ul>
	Spirit animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Role model</li> <li>▪ Inspiration</li> <li>▪ Icon</li> <li>▪ Patronus (from the Harry Potter series)</li> </ul>
	Indian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Native American</li> <li>▪ American Indian</li> <li>▪ Indigenous American</li> </ul>
Jewish people	Ghetto (also used as a slur against the Black community)	Inferior
	Hip Hip Hooray	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hooray (only the “hip hip” is considered problematic)</li> <li>▪ Yay</li> </ul>
The LGBTQIA+ Community	“That’s so gay!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “That’s bizarre!”</li> <li>▪ “That’s silly!”</li> <li>▪ “That’s weird!”</li> </ul>
	Hermaphrodite	Intersex
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transvestite</li> <li>▪ Transsexual</li> <li>▪ Transgendered</li> <li>▪ Tranny</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transgender</li> <li>▪ Trans</li> <li>▪ Transfeminine</li> <li>▪ Transmasculine</li> </ul>
	No homo	<i>The best and most respectful thing to do is to say nothing at all.</i>
People with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lame</li> <li>▪ Special needs</li> <li>▪ Retar**d</li> <li>▪ Dumb</li> <li>▪ Stupid</li> <li>▪ Moron</li> <li>▪ Spastic</li> <li>▪ Derp</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pathetic</li> <li>▪ Not cool</li> <li>▪ Annoying</li> <li>▪ Frustrating</li> <li>▪ Irritating</li> <li>▪ Ignorant</li> <li>▪ Dense</li> <li>▪ Silly</li> <li>▪ Foolish</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blind to...</li> <li>▪ Turn a blind eye...</li> <li>▪ Blinded by...</li> <li>▪ Turn a deaf ear to...</li> <li>▪ Tone deaf</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Willfully ignorant</li> <li>▪ Deliberately ignoring</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crippled/cripling</li> <li>▪ Paralyzed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Frozen by</li> <li>▪ Completely stuck</li> <li>▪ “I feel overwhelmed!”</li> </ul>

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<p>People with disabilities, specific to people with mental or emotional disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crazy</li> <li>▪ Insane</li> <li>▪ Nuts</li> <li>▪ Psychotic</li> <li>▪ Bonkers</li> <li>▪ Deranged</li> <li>▪ Lunatic</li> <li>▪ Loony</li> <li>▪ Schizophrenic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outrageous</li> <li>▪ Ridiculous</li> <li>▪ Absurd</li> <li>▪ Silly</li> <li>▪ Wild</li> <li>▪ Ludicrous</li> <li>▪ Bogus</li> <li>▪ Asinine</li> </ul> <p><i>As a note, some of these words are explicit synonyms for “crazy,” and there’s debate about if they’re better... general consensus is these are still better than “crazy” but people have different preferences</i></p> <p><i>Also, please do not use clinical language or labels to “diagnose” other people’s emotional states or behavior or to describe your own.</i></p>
	<p>“[xyz] makes me want to kill myself”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “This is so frustrating!”</li> <li>▪ “I am so irritated!”</li> </ul>
	<p>“That person belongs on the short-bus.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “They’re frustrating me.”</li> <li>▪ “I am annoyed with that person.”</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “That person is so bipolar.”</li> <li>▪ “What a sociopath/psychopath.”</li> <li>▪ “What a whack job/whacko.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “What a jerk!”</li> <li>▪ “That person is being really mean.”</li> <li>▪ “They’re acting really irrationally.”</li> </ul>
	<p>“I have PTSD from that meeting.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “I’m feeling really stressed!”</li> <li>▪ “This is overwhelming!”</li> </ul>
	<p>“I feel so OCD (or ADD or bipolar) today”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “I feel really out of sorts today!”</li> <li>▪ “I feel all over the place!”</li> <li>▪ “I can feel my need to control things coming out!”</li> </ul>
<p>Romani people</p>	<p>Gyp/gyped</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ripped off</li> <li>▪ Fraud</li> <li>▪ Shortchanged</li> <li>▪ Swindle</li> </ul>
<p>Victims of Assault</p>	<p>Butthurt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offended</li> <li>▪ Defeated</li> <li>▪ Shamed</li> </ul>
<p>Women-identifying people</p>	<p>Hysterical</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Impassioned</li> <li>▪ Vehement</li> </ul>

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## You Will Make Mistakes! What to Do When That Happens

We all make mistakes! Staying grounded in a growth mindset creates the space for learning, change and improvement. Changing, updating and adapting our language, especially when it might be grounded in how we were raised or our personal values, can be difficult. We are moving from unknowing to recognizing our mistakes to building new habits in how we speak.

It is all our responsibility to build inclusion and to be responsive to feedback when we might not get it right. We proceed with good intent, but even with good intentions, sometimes our impact is harmful. Let's begin to normalize acknowledging when we screw up and apologizing. Being open and vulnerable helps to build your credibility and trust with others.

### IN THE MOMENT...

- That's not what I meant to say... I am working on this! I meant to say...
- Oh, my bad! I'm sorry. I meant to say...
- I'm sorry; I wanted to say... instead.

### ONGOING...

- Do your research; find resources online to help you build your knowledge and acumen.
- Ask! Just because a word or phrase is commonly used and accepted by a broader community doesn't mean that specifically applies to your colleague or direct report. Ask people's preferences.
- Acknowledge that you are learning and growing and that you are committed to change; seek out feedback proactively.

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