

# WORDS MATTER

## Academy's Inclusive Language Principles



Inquire. Inspire. Impact.

1. Inclusive language, as a culturally responsive practice, begins with a genuine interest and effort of having people belong. We are not always going to get it “right,” as there is no solid right. Approach language with a goal of building connections and strengthening relationships.
2. When interacting with people, ask how they want to be addressed, as this may fluctuate between settings. Using honorifics (or titles), identities, subject matter, or acronyms based on perceptions can lead to miscommunication. [Inquire with Humility.](#)
3. Choose language with the understanding that the individual or group preference supersedes your personal and grammatical style. Not all individuals or groups utilize the same terms that categorize identities or cultures.

Person-first language	Identity-first language
prioritizes the personhood, or wholeness, of the person rather than their identity(ies). <a href="#">Person-first language</a>	allows individuals to claim their identity(ies) rather than permitting others to name their characteristics or make assumptions.

*Unless otherwise notified by the individual or group, it is suggested to lead with person-first language as it acknowledges the inherent and equal value of every individual, before attaching a descriptor.*

4. Be gender-inclusive. When addressing groups use gender-neutral terms such as, “you all”, “team”, “everybody”, “colleagues”, in order to recognize the diversity of your audience. When describing a person, use that person’s pronouns and/or name (ask, rather than assume.) If unsure, gender-neutral language is appropriate.
5. An awareness of the connection between language and behavioral health is important to building inclusive spaces. Many of the words we casually use have also been used to marginalize people, and words that have multiple meanings can cause harm and lead to trauma. Use words that fully describe your feelings and thoughts. For example, “The weather keeps changing quickly” versus assigning a mental health diagnosis to weather patterns.