

**The University of Melbourne**

# **Cultural Diversity in Publications:**

## Guidelines for Good Practice

The Cultural Diversity Policy includes a commitment to 'developing and disseminating information in a format which is coherent, easily accessible and appropriate to the needs of the whole University community'.

In practical terms this means that:

- language used must reflect the University's commitment to cultural diversity and equal opportunity policies;
- reasonable requests for publications to be made available in alternative formats should be met.

The following principles have been established and should be applied to any piece of writing:

- People from culturally diverse backgrounds are treated with equal respect
- Plain English is used to ensure clarity of expression
- Irrelevance in relation to cultural 'difference' is avoided
- No person or group is inappropriately excluded
- There is stylistic consistency in the publication.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# PART A: Guidelines for Accessibility and Inclusivity

## 1. Guidelines for Accessibility

To accommodate the needs of all readers, including those with a disability which necessitates use of materials in an alternative format, every effort should be made to provide your publication in the format requested (eg. large print, plain text file). Complying with reasonable requests is required under current disability legislation.

*All publications should clearly indicate the procedure to be followed in order to request a copy of the document in an alternative format.*

Further information regarding production of materials in alternative formats can be obtained from the Disability Liaison Unit on 8344 7068.

### 1.1 Guidelines for improved visual access to printed materials:

- use font size 12 or above wherever possible;
- provide strong contrast between print and background;
- avoid red text where possible;
- use clear layout, without visual distraction in the background;
- use matt or low sheen paper.

### 1.2 Guidelines for inclusive access to Web pages:

Design of Web pages that are accessible for people with disabilities, including those who use speech synthesisers, is critical. Before designing sites, staff should be familiar with the Guidelines available at:

<http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/>

For information on preparation of course materials (lecture notes and overheads) in alternative formats see:

**Guidelines for Commonwealth Information Published in Electronic Formats:**  
<http://www.hreoc.gov.au>

University contact:  
Anne Seuling  
Phone: 8344 8079  
Email: [a.seuling@communications.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:a.seuling@communications.unimelb.edu.au)

## 2. Guidelines for Inclusive Copy

### 2.1 Accessible Language

To ensure content is easily accessible to target readers, the following guidelines should be followed:

- language used must convey a clear, unambiguous and uncomplicated message;
- language should avoid use of colloquialisms, jargon, slang, acronyms, or locally-specific text references;
- when making assumptions of background knowledge, writers should acknowledge that not all readers have the same cultural experiences;
- assumptions of readability level should allow for English not being the reader's first language.

Out-dated, potentially offensive or patronising terms, eg. 'handicapped', 'low socio-economic', 'victim of ...' (eg. depression), 'wheelchair bound' should be avoided. Preferred terminology would be: 'people with a disability', 'low income/socially disadvantaged', '... has clinical depression', '...uses a wheelchair'.

### 2.2 Guidelines for inclusion

Copy needs to reflect the scope and diversity of cultural backgrounds experienced in the University community.

Language and visual representation may reinforce prejudice and carry a discriminatory message. The Equal Opportunity Unit guidelines: *What Did I Say? Using Non-Discriminatory Language (1999)*, obtainable from the Equal Opportunity Unit, encourages rigorous and ongoing examination of spoken or written language, explaining discriminatory language under the categories:

- stereotyping;
- invisibility and omission;
- extra visibility (emphasis on difference);
- negative labelling;
- trivialisation and denigration.

In order to avoid discrimination and ensure content of publications is inclusive, examine publications in order to avoid the following pitfalls:

### **Stereotyping**

One member, or a small group, cannot speak from a position of authority or authenticity to represent their broad identity category. To present views in this way suggests that all people who identify in a particular way (with a group) are the same, and that they all believe or experience the same things.

### **Invisibility and Omission**

While purporting to refer to all members of a group, the communication actually leaves some members out.

Reference to a group should not leave out members of that group, for example to write that *Australians continue to refer to Britain as the 'old country'* ignores many Australians from other backgrounds.

'Man' as a generic term reinforces the exclusion and invisibility of women. *Man* and *he/his* in the generic sense should be avoided.

### **Passive representation**

Use of the passive in sentence structure may convey a negative image. For example, a photo caption: *Professor Jones discusses the project with Sally Smith* implies man as action, woman as recipient of action, whereas discussion, in fact, takes two. Instead use: *Professor Tom Jones and Ms Sally Smith discuss the project*. Titles used should be consistent, ie. either use full titles of all those mentioned: Professor Jones, Ms Smith, Dr King and Deputy Vice Chancellor Young, or all given names, without titles: Tom Jones, Sally Smith etc. Avoid giving titles (with or without given names) for some and first names only for others.

### **Positive Images**

Relevance of text and images should be considered from the perspective of the entire University community, not only culturally dominant groups. References to people must be integrated – not used as a token or singled out for 'difference'. This does not mean that a person's disability, ethnicity, sex, age etc. is irrelevant, or to be masked or ignored, but inclusion in a broad context acknowledges that

people are more than such characteristics. On no account should cultural groups or members of groups be represented as being a 'problem'.

Positive images can be subtle. Incorporating people with non-visible disabilities (such as hearing loss or psychiatric disability) in an image *directly* related to disability, rather than only showing people in wheelchairs or using guide dogs, makes people aware of the broader range of disabilities present in the community. Depicting same sex couples, men with children and no female partner can also make powerful statements.

### **Extra visibility (Emphasis on Difference)**

In many contexts it is irrelevant to mention a person's sex, race, cultural background, sexuality, age, disability, or physical appearance. Highlighting such information may be gratuitous or sensationalising.

Irrelevant information perpetuates society's assumptions about structures, roles and positions. It is extremely rare to read – *a male professor, a heterosexual teacher, a white lawyer, an able-bodied athlete*, as these adjectives are often assumed. Other descriptors (black, gay, female) are quite common.

The same applies to title information – *groundsman (gardener, landscaper), salesgirl (shop assistant), housewife (homemaker), spokesman (spokesperson)*.

### **Sensationalising**

Experiences are sensationalised by gratuitous references to 'special' characteristics.

Representing people with disabilities as more courageous or heroic than other people makes their lives into a spectacle. Representing people of different ethnic backgrounds as exotic or exciting is not appropriate.

### **Misrepresentation**

Cultural practices and religion must be accurately described, and treated with equal respect. Referring to Indigenous Australian religious practices and creation stories as myth, legend, superstition or sorcery, when other religious beliefs are afforded higher respect, is dismissive and ignorant of alternative perspectives.

### **Negative labelling**

References and descriptions such as *the Asian, the blind, the aged, the disabled* may dehumanise and imply powerlessness. *An Asian student* highlights the cultural 'difference', whereas *a student from Singapore* focuses foremost on the individual. Where it is irrelevant to include the additional information, simply write *'the student'*.

### **Denigration**

So-called positive statements can actually be quite insulting. An excellent test for the validity of the inclusion of a 'positive' statement is to reframe it in terms of the opposite or 'in-group'. For example it would be odd to say:

*She has done so well for ... a person from a high income family*  
*He is amazing for ... someone who can walk*

whereas the opposite may be unnoticed.

### **3. Feedback loop**

To ensure sure that your message is inclusive, consult people from a range of cultural backgrounds from the initial concept stage and actively seek feedback on your publications from members of different cultural groups.



To obtain a copy of this document in an alternative format contact:

Julia Powell  
Phone: (03) 8344 0799  
Email: [j.powell@elp.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:j.powell@elp.unimelb.edu.au)

## **PART B: Checklist for Accessibility and Inclusivity**

### **Accessibility**

Have you ensured that your publication:

- adheres to guidelines for improved visual access
- clearly identifies the procedure to be followed to request a copy in an alternative format (eg. electronic)

### **Copy**

- uses language and visual images which are representative of the multi-cultural nature of the University environment
- keeps language as simple and straightforward as possible
- does not include stereotypical references in text or visual image
- avoids the use of man and he/his in the generic sense
- includes positive images of people from diverse cultural groups without a token or oddity factor
- does not include gratuitous, sensationalising references, or irrelevancies related to cultural 'difference'
- avoids inappropriate generalisations
- reports culturally relevant information with accuracy and equal respect
- uses acceptable and appropriate references and descriptions for groups.
- does not include culturally specific language, eg. Australian colloquialisms and examples.

### **Feedback loop**

- people from a range of cultural backgrounds have been consulted from the initial concept stage, and have contributed to the content and compilation of the copy.

**Equity and Learning Programs Unit  
Equal Opportunity Unit  
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