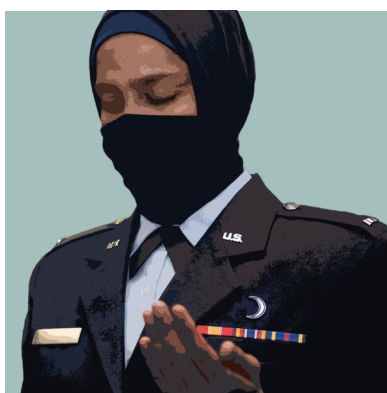
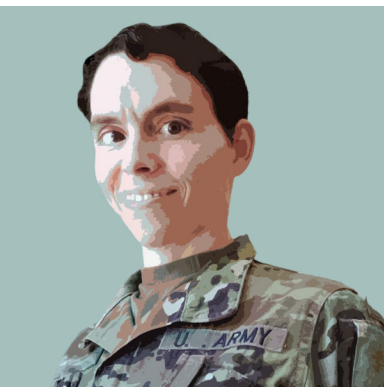




DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION



A MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY STYLE GUIDE



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Introduction

Military Community and Family Policy developed this guide to provide editorial and visual guidance to staff and contractors who support MC&FP and related programs in creating content that avoids bias; promotes justice, impartiality and fairness; and reflects the diverse nature of the military and the nation it serves.

Definitions: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The following definitions appear in the MC&FP Style Guide.

Diversity — All the different characteristics and attributes of individuals from varying demographics that are consistent with the core values of the Defense Department, integral to overall readiness and mission accomplishment, and reflective of the nation we serve. When creating content for MC&FP, writers, designers and other team members should consider diversity and ensure that content represents a diverse audience in terms of age, race, differing abilities, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Equity — The impartial treatment, equality of opportunity and advancement, and fairness in access to information and resources for all people. Equity also refers to the process of identifying and eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. When creating content for MC&FP, writers, designers and other team members should seek to further the goal of promoting justice, impartiality and fairness across Defense Department programs, services and systems.

Inclusion — A set of behaviors (culture) that encourages service members and civilian employees to feel valued for unique qualities and to experience a sense of belonging. Inclusive diversity is the process of valuing and integrating each individual's perspectives, ideas and contributions into the way an organization functions and makes decisions, enabling diverse workforce members to contribute to their full potential in collaborative pursuit of organizational objectives. When creating content for MC&FP, writers, designers and other team members should be as inclusive as possible and avoid making assumptions based on age, race, differing abilities, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Writing Best Practices

Military Community and Family Policy strives to be inclusive of all military audiences in communications materials and across all branded materials. Follow these best practices to ensure your writing reflects and advances the Defense Department's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and allows audiences to feel seen, recognized, respected and valued.

- ✓ Avoid defaulting to the assumption that the reader is white, straight and does not have a disability.
- ✓ Don't use "he" as a universal pronoun.
- ✓ Aim to accurately represent the diverse makeup of the military community, which includes people of differing abilities, races, ethnicities, genders and sexual orientation.
- ✓ Use language that is clear, objective and free of stereotypes to avoid the risk of confusing or upsetting the reader.
- ✓ Avoid generalizations when writing about someone's ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.

Language continually evolves and preferred terms may fall out of favor. For the latest guidance, consult the Associated Press Stylebook.

DISABILITIES AND AGING

"Disabled" is a general term for a physical, mental, developmental or intellectual disability. Use person-first language when writing about people with disabilities: "The person who uses a wheelchair," instead of, "the wheelchair user;" "children with special needs," instead of "special needs children."

- ✓ Avoid terms that connote pity: "The organization helps veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder," instead of, "the organization helps veterans who suffer from PTSD."
- ✓ Remember not to equate the person with a condition. A person isn't their disability, a person has a disability.
- ✓ Avoid terms that use disabilities as negative metaphors, such as "blind to," "falls on deaf ears," "lame," etc.
- ✓ When possible, cite a person's age or the age range of a group when writing about older adults: "The program is for adults 65 and over."

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
Older person; older adult	Elderly or senior citizen
Uses a wheelchair	Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound
Disabled	Handicapped
Person with a disability; people with disabilities	Disabled person; the disabled
Caregiver	Caretaker

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
Person without a disability	Able-bodied

GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

People often confuse gender and sex. The following definitions clarify the distinction among sex, gender and related terms.

SEX

The biological characteristics of male or female.

GENDER IDENTITY

One’s internal sense of being male or female. Someone who is nonbinary identifies as neither strictly male nor strictly female.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A person’s sexual orientation refers to who they are attracted to physically, emotionally and/or romantically.

TRANSGENDER

A term used to describe people whose sex at birth is different from their sense of being male or female. A transgender male is someone who was born with female biological characteristics but identifies as male. A transgender female is someone who was born with male biological characteristics but identifies as female.

LGBT OR LGBTQ

The Associated Press Stylebook prefers these acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (the Q stands for questioning and/or queer). However, in quotations and formal names of organizations or events, other forms of the acronym are acceptable with the other letters explained. For example, in the acronym, LGBTQIA, “I” generally stands for intersex, and “A” can stand for asexual or ally.

GENDER

- ✓ Use gender-neutral language.
- ✓ Do not write “he or she” or “him or hers” except in direct quotations. See the MC&FP Style Guide for further guidance.
- ✓ Rewrite when possible to avoid using gender-specific pronouns: Instead of, “Brighten your service member’s day by sending him a care package,” write, “Brighten your service member’s day with a care package.”
- ✓ Write in relationship-neutral terms, such as “partner” and “couple.”

- ✓ Don't assume the reader fits into a traditional gender role.
- ✓ Avoid writing "both," "either" or "opposite" sexes or genders as a way to encompass all people.
- ✓ Use "service member" when referring to members of the armed forces. Only on rare occasions should a service member be referred to by gender. In those cases, use "serviceman," "servicewoman," "servicemen" or "servicewomen."

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
They/them/theirs	He, she/him, her/his, hers
Partner; partner or spouse (use spouse when writing about programs available only to married spouses of service members)	Husband or wife
Parent or guardian	Mother or father
Different sex or gender	Opposite sex or gender

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- ✓ Avoid the term sexual preference, which implies a conscious choice.
- ✓ Don't confuse gender identity with sexual orientation. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- ✓ Avoid referring to people as their gender identity or sexual orientation. For example, instead of "lesbian," write, "lesbian woman."

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
Sexual orientation	Sexual preference
Gay or lesbian (as adjectives)	Homosexual
Gay man; lesbian woman; transgender male or female	Gay; lesbian; transgender (as nouns)
Cross-dresser	Transvestite, drag queen
Transgender	Transsexual
Marriage	Same-sex marriage or gay marriage
Parent	Mother or father
Child; children	Son(s) or daughter(s)

RACE AND ETHNICITY

When writing content that references race or ethnicity, be sensitive regarding labels that may be inaccurate or hurtful. For example, use the word “neighborhood” instead of “inner city,” which has negative connotations.

- ✓ Avoid making broad generalizations. For example, the term BIPOC, which stands for Black, Indigenous and people of color, can be problematic because it lumps everyone who isn’t Black, Indigenous or white into the same category.
- ✓ Only use broad terms such as people of color when it is central to the content. For example, when writing about DOD initiatives to eliminate discrimination against nonwhite service members. Otherwise, be specific about a person or group’s race, ethnicity or heritage when possible.
- ✓ When referring to a person’s race or ethnicity, do so as an adjective, not a noun: A Hispanic person instead of a Hispanic.
- ✓ Be specific when possible. For example, an American whose heritage is Chinese should be referred to as Chinese American rather than Asian American.

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
Biracial or multiracial (specify heritages when known)	Mixed race
People from various racial and ethnic backgrounds; diverse groups; various heritages; different cultures	People of color; BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color)
American Indian or Native American When possible, name the tribal affiliation	Indian

RELATIONSHIPS

Families come in many different configurations and the relationships among family members and couples may defy conventional labels.

- ✓ Don’t assume couples who live together are married or are of the opposite sex.
- ✓ Remember that family structures vary. Grandparents may be the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, some parents are single by choice or circumstance, siblings may be biologically related through both parents, one or neither parent.
- ✓ Don’t assume that family members live in the same household.

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
Partner. But use spouse when writing about programs, such as the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program, that are available only to those who are married to service members.	Husband or wife
Children	Son or daughter; biological children; adoptive children; illegitimate children
Parents	Adoptive parents; biological parents
Parent, guardian or adult	Mother, father, parent

RELIGION AND CULTURE

The Defense Department recognizes the right of service members to observe the tenets of their religion, or to observe no religion at all. When addressing religious faith or cultural practices in writing, keep the following in mind:

- ✓ Use nondenominational terms.
- ✓ Aim for diversity when citing examples of holidays and cultural traditions. An article about connecting as a family during the holidays might say: “If your family celebrates one of the winter holidays, set aside an evening together to string popcorn for your Christmas tree or decorate your home for Hanukkah or Kwanzaa. If holidays aren’t part of your tradition, connect as a family by preparing your favorite snacks and playing board games.”
- ✓ Avoid assumptions about your audience’s belief system, cultural traditions and observances: “You might find a support group at your house of worship, if you attend one,” instead of, “You might find a support group at your church.”

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
Winter holidays or holiday season	Christmas
House of worship	Church
Chaplain or clergy	Minister or pastor
Dress in nice clothing	Wear your Sunday best
Religious or spiritual belief	Religious belief

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, EDUCATION AND IMMIGRATION STATUS

Be conscious of the language you use to describe where people fall on the socioeconomic scale, their education level or legal status. Many seemingly innocuous words are demeaning or stigmatizing. For example, the word “needy” conveys helplessness. Instead “Needy people visited the food pantry,” say, “People experiencing food insecurity visited the food pantry.”

- ✓ Use “person-first” language to avoid hurtful or inaccurate labels: “A person without a home,” instead of, “homeless person.”
- ✓ Focus on what people have, rather than on what they lack or failed to accomplish: “People who completed some high school (or specify the last grade completed, if known),” rather than, “high school dropout.”
- ✓ Be specific, if possible, when writing about people who entered or live in the U.S. illegally: “Young adults who came to the U.S. to study, but overstayed their student visas;” “Immigrants who crossed the border illegally;” “She was brought here as a child by Columbian parents who entered the country without a visa.”

PREFERRED	AS OPPOSED TO
People whose incomes are below the federal poverty level; People living below the federal poverty level	The poor; poor people; the impoverished
Mothers (or families) who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	Welfare mothers; welfare families; welfare reliant
People who are homeless; people experiencing homelessness; people without housing	The homeless
People who are undocumented; People who entered the country illegally; People who are living in the country without legal permission	Illegal immigrant(s); illegal alien(s); the undocumented
Opportunity gap	Achievement gap
People without a high school diploma (if the content allows, note the highest grade completed)	High school dropout; the poorly educated

Visual Style Guide

Choose imagery for MC&FP content that reflects the diversity of the armed forces and the U.S. population as a whole (as seen on the front cover). This includes:

- ✓ People of different races, ethnicities, abilities, ages and body sizes
- ✓ Representations of different celebrations and traditions
- ✓ Same-sex couples with and without families
- ✓ Families with different structures (grandparents raising children, single parents)
- ✓ Families whose members are of different races or ethnicities
- ✓ Partners/spouses who are of different races or ethnicities

Accessibility

MC&FP complies with federal accessibility standards, which implement the 1998 amendment to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. This ensures equal access to online content, regardless of ability.

Accessible content can be read by a screen reader for users with low or no vision, includes audio and video transcripts and captions for those with hearing loss, and uses clear language and formatting. Pages are navigable for those with impaired mobility and color blindness.

Ensuring that all users can access MC&FP's digital content requires a coordinated effort involving everyone from programmers to 508-compliance testers. As a writer, make sure your content is accessible to all users by doing the following:

- ✓ Follow plain language guidelines.
- ✓ Avoid long blocks of text, which can be difficult for people with cognitive impairments and learning disabilities to understand.
- ✓ Use bullets, which make information easier to scan and understand.
- ✓ Write descriptive headings so the reader will know what to expect.
- ✓ Use formatting and style options for headings and subheads so they can be recognized by screen readers.
- ✓ Write meaningful text when hyperlinking so users will know where the link will take them. For example, write: "Download the user guide," instead of, "Click here to download the user guide."

Designers can create accessible content by doing the following:

- ✓ Make sure the contrast between the text and its background is high enough to be read by people with low vision. For example, avoid gray text on a white background.
- ✓ Check for high color contrast on graphics so they can be distinguished by users who are color blind or have other visual impairments.
- ✓ Don't rely on color alone to guide the user. Include labels.
- ✓ Tag images with descriptive alternative text for screen readers.

For more tips on how to create accessible content, including eLearning courses and checklists for creating different types of content, see the accessibility tools page on Military OneSource.

Additional Terms and Definitions

African American — A U.S. citizen of African descent. Do not hyphenate this term.

American Indians — People whose ancestry in the United States predates the arrival of Europeans. When known, use the names of the tribe or tribes. When referring to an individual, identify their tribal affiliation: “The service member is a citizen of the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma,” not, “The service member is an American Indian.”

Asian American — An American of Asian descent. When possible, specify a person's country of origin: Chinese American, Cambodian American.

BIPOC — An acronym for Black, Indigenous and people of color. Do not use unless in a direct quote or in the formal name of an organization. In those cases, explain what BIPOC stands for.

biracial — A person of two racial heritages. Be specific when possible: “She has an African American mother and a white father.”

Black — A more encompassing term than African American because it includes people who do not live in the U.S., as well as Americans not of African descent, such as those of Caribbean heritage. Capitalize this term. Do not use as a singular noun.

disabled — A general term for a physical, mental, developmental or intellectual impairment. Do not use as a noun; use person-first language instead: “People with disabilities,” instead of, “the disabled.”

ethnicity — A person's cultural identity. Ethnicity may include shared language, customs, religion and nationality.

gender identity — A person’s internal sense of being male or female. The way an individual expresses their gender identity is frequently called “gender expression,” and may or may not conform to social stereotypes associated with a particular gender.

gender-nonconforming — A person or people who do not conform to gender expectations.

Hispanic — A person from, or whose ancestors are from, a Spanish-speaking land or culture. When possible, be specific about the country of origin.

illegal immigration — Entering or living in a country without authorization. Don’t use the nouns “alien,” “illegal” or “illegal immigrant” to describe people who entered or are living in the country illegally. Instead say, “people who are undocumented,” “people who entered the country illegally,” or “people who are living in the country without legal permission.”

Indigenous — An original inhabitant of a place. Capitalize this term when it is used to describe identity — “The Indigenous people of Arizona.”

Latino, Latina — A person from a Spanish-speaking land or culture or with Latin American ancestry. Use Latinos to refer to groups of males or mixed-gender groups and Latinas to refer to groups of females. Be specific about the country of origin when possible.

Latinx — A gender-neutral term for Latino or Latina. Avoid using except in direct quotes and formal names of organizations, unless specifically requested by those being described. Include a short explanation of the term when using it.

LGBT or LGBTQ — An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The Q stands for questioning and/or queer. Use either of these acronyms as an adjective and an umbrella term. However, other forms of the acronym are acceptable in quotations and formal names of organizations or events with the other letters explained. For example, in the acronym LGBTQIA, “I” generally stands for intersex, and “A” can stand for asexual or ally.

multiracial — A person or persons of more than one racial heritage or a group made up of people of any combination of races.

national origin — A person’s or their ancestor’s place of origin. Also applies to an individual who has the physical, cultural or linguistic characteristics of a national group.

Native Americans — People whose ancestry in the U.S. predates the arrival of Europeans. It can be used interchangeably with American Indians. When known, use the names of the tribe or tribes. Use the name of their tribe when referring to an individual: “The service member is a citizen of the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma.”

nonbinary — A person whose gender identity is neither strictly male or female.

Pacific Islander — A person ethnically from Hawaii, Guam, Samoa or other Pacific Islands. When possible, specify the country of origin. For example, “Native Hawaiian.”

people of color — This term is acceptable when used broadly to describe multiple races other than white, but aim to be specific when possible: “The service members who volunteered for the mission were African American, Asian American and Native American.” Do not use the singular “person of color.”

race — A category of people who share certain genetic physical traits.

same-sex marriage/couple/domestic partner — A marriage or intimate relationship between two men or two women. Avoid these terms unless relevant to the content. Instead, simply say “marriage,” “couple” or “partners.”

sex — The biological characteristics of male or female.

sexual orientation — A person’s sexual orientation refers to who they are attracted to physically, emotionally and/or romantically. Use this term instead of “sexual preference,” which implies a conscious choice.

transgender — A term used to describe people whose sex at birth is different from their sense of being male or female. A transgender male is someone who was born with female biological characteristics but identifies as male. A transgender female is someone who was born with male biological characteristics but identifies as female.

white — A term to describe people of European descent. Do not use as a singular noun. Do not capitalize.

Resources

[Department of Defense Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)

[Military OneSource Accessibility Tools](#)

[DoD Instruction 1020.05 DoD Diversity and Inclusion Management Program](#)

[DoD Instruction 1350.02 DoD Military Equal Opportunity Program](#)

[Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce](#)