

The Varsity
Equity Guide
March 2020



PREAMBLE

Welcome to *The Varsity* Equity Guide. This guide intends to shape our stylistic and editorial practices in a way that includes, empowers, and fairly represents equity-seeking communities.

As journalists, we recognize that language is power. In recent years, we have been confronted on numerous occasions about how our coverage has fallen short. How we report about marginalized and minoritized communities, how we discuss stigmatized and traumatic issues, and how we frame stories concerning justice all impact how U of T readers understand and act in the world around them. We do not take this responsibility lightly, and we call on *The Varsity's* journalists to consciously use this resource to help inform how they navigate storytelling — editorial, visual, and online — in the future.

The equity guide has been in development since Volume 140 began in the summer of 2019. Following months of conversation, debate, and dialogue between masthead members, reviewing countless online resources, and seeking guidance from U of T community members, we are proud to finally publicly release the inaugural draft in March 2020. That being said, many of the ideas you will find in this guide have already been systematically implemented throughout Volume 140 through conscious editing, helping to sharpen our coverage.

We want to give special thanks to Indigenous Cultural Competency Trainer John Crutch, the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office, the Sexual & Gender Diversity Office, and Students for Reproductive Justice for their guidance on equity this year. But we also want to emphasize the term “inaugural draft” — this is not a final or perfect document. By no means are we experts on any of these issues. But we are always seeking to improve.

Our objective is for this to be a living document: this document is open to *Varsity* staff members, readers, and U of T community members for extended consultation and feedback. We hope to regularly update this guide accordingly, so that it can serve as many communities as possible. We hope that such public engagement holds us accountable to our commitment to equitable coverage. We invite you to critique the guide as you see fit through this [feedback form](#).

At the heart of this guide is an aspiration to treat people of all kinds with human dignity. How we behave and build meaningful relationships with marginalized communities, and how we represent marginalized community members in our own organization also matter in the pursuit of equity. Hence, the equity guide, in and of itself, is only one step — but we hope it's a big one.

— Ibnul Chowdhury, Managing Editor & Ori Gilboa, Senior Copy Editor

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I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Free speech

The Varsity, as a media organization, is inherently committed to free speech and a diversity of opinions, in accordance with its Operating Policy. Free speech refers to a freedom of expression without government suppression, with reasonable limits, such as defamation. However, it is important for journalists to recognize that free speech is not speech without consequence; receiving backlash or resistance to expression does not constitute a violation of free expression. Hence, any journalistic source or commentator that claims that free speech is being violated, when the infringing party is not the government, should be contextualized as incorrectly invoking free speech.

While everyone has a right to express themselves, *The Varsity* has a responsibility to produce responsible and non-harmful journalism for the U of T community, and is not obligated to provide a platform to all kinds of speech. *The Varsity* specifically refuses to platform hate groups and condemns hate speech, which is defined at both the federal and provincial level. It is an offence to publicly communicate statements that wilfully promote hatred against identifiable groups. The term 'identifiable groups' refers to any section of the public distinguished by colour, race, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or mental or physical disability.

The Varsity acknowledge that hate speech and hate crimes, which are traditional criminal offences that are done out of prejudice against the victim due to their affiliation with an identifiable group, remain "alleged" or "possible" until a court rules it as such. That being said, *The Varsity* asks journalists to be cautious when engaging with hate speech and hate groups, and where quoting or engaging with their material is deemed necessary, to provide full context and frame such content appropriately. (See the "Exclusionary ideologies" subsection for further detail.)

False balance

An impartial consideration of diverse perspectives is integral to journalism, especially in news and science writing. However, reporting equally on 'both sides' of a debate can lead to misleading and low-quality journalism. Ultimately, the truth is more important than a false and forced gesture of balance.

Jonathan Foster, a former professor of journalism at Sheffield University, said: "If someone says it's raining, and another person says it's dry, it's not your job to quote them both. Your job is to look out the... window and find out which is true."

False balance, or attributing more weight to an argument than evidence shows, can be harmful. Journalists should research beyond what different spokespersons have to say to get as close as one can to the truth of the matter.

For example, climate deniers should not be given equal speaking space as climate advocates, just as the anti-vaccine movement should not be given place equally to doctors. Any 'side' that offers false claims should be contextualized as such. This is not discrimination or bias, but simply a respect for factual accuracy.

Content warnings and support hotlines

It is important for journalists to be conscious of the mental toll that some articles may have on readers. As such, ethical reporting on topics that include descriptions of: suicide and self-harm; physical, emotional, and mental abuse; sexual violence; or quotations of slurs against an identifiable group, must include content warnings. These content warnings must describe in surface-level detail the content that may distress readers, and be placed at the top of the article.

Similarly, easily accessible support hotlines and resources are crucial in articles that might leave readers especially distressed. The list of hotlines can be found in respective sections in the following guide. Ensure that they are placed at the bottom of each article.

Respecting advocacy groups

When a journalist wishes to report on issues or communities that concern justice, it is important for them to reach out to advocacy groups around campus. These groups often have unique and valuable perspectives about the issues they advocate for, and it is important to keep them centred in *The Varsity's* reporting, since journalists will not necessarily be experts in the topics assigned to them. For example, if reporting on anti-abortion protests on campus, journalists may find it fruitful to reach out to the Students for Reproductive Justice.

However, journalists should note that requesting comment on short deadlines places both emotional and physical labour on advocacy workers, who might already deal with a heavy workload. This is especially true if journalists have not built adequate relationships with campus groups. As such, it is important to reach out to advocacy groups early on, to not expect a comment, and to make it clear that they can decline to comment. Most importantly, journalists should ensure that they are investing time and effort into building relationships instead of simply getting a comment in a way that might be perceived as extractive and exploitative.

II: COVERING IDENTITY

Prejudice and power

When it comes to covering marginalized identities, journalists must recognize that there is a difference between prejudice and prejudice underlined by power. Prejudice is a negative preconceived notion about a group of people that is not based on experience or reason. It is a negative judgement formed without just ground. Anyone from any group can be prejudiced against another group. Prejudice underlined by power, on the other hand, refers to prejudice that is reinforced by, and that reinforces, historically-rooted institutions and systems in society. [The Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre explains this difference in detail.](#)

For example, there is a difference between racial prejudice and racism. Racism is racial prejudice coupled with institutionalized power. It refers to derogatory or discriminatory beliefs about a marginalized racial group that is reinforced by the power of the dominant racial group. Access to resources, control of institutional structures, and dictation of social norms mean that the dominant group has institutional power to back their beliefs such that harm is placed upon the marginalized group. In settler colonial countries like Canada, white settlers of European origin hold this institutionalized power, while racialized communities, such as Indigenous peoples, lack it.

In this regard, Indigenous peoples can be prejudiced toward white people, but not racist. White people, on the other hand, can be racist toward Indigenous peoples. We extend this equation of prejudice and power to all other forms of marginalization as defined by an '-ism': sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, classism, ableism, ageism, among others. For example, women can be prejudiced toward men, but they cannot be sexist toward men. Men can be sexist toward women, because they hold institutional power in society.

Race and ethnicity

Race as a social construct; racialization as a social process

When discussing race, *The Varsity's* default terms are "racialized person" or "racialized group" [in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Commission](#). In some cases, "person of colour" and "visible minority" (for example, with reference to the Canadian census) may be appropriate. "Racialized" is the preferred description because race is a social construct, and racialization is a social process that society imposes onto certain groups that renders them marginalized. The challenge with nouns such as "visible minority" or "people of colour" is that they frame race as an essential, immutable characteristic that defines a group, rather than as a construct and process that is done to a certain group.

The same distinction applies to the term ‘minority’: describing a person, group, or community as “minoritized” is more appropriate because it reflects that a power dynamic has been imposed onto them; they are not essentially, naturally, or immutably in a subordinate position to the “majority.” The Department of Communication of the University of Washington [explains this difference](#).

Distinguishing Black and Indigenous peoples

Nonetheless, in cases where a journalist may have reason to use “people of colour,” it may also be appropriate to distinguish between Black, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous people of colour. In the context of Canada, Black and Indigenous peoples experience distinct forms of racism compared to other racialized groups. Hence, journalists should recognize the value of more fleshed out terms like Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC).

Accordingly, *The Varsity* capitalizes “Black” and “Indigenous,” while other racial categories, such as “white” and “brown” should not be capitalized. Journalists should recognize that there is a strong shared, distinct, and historical social and cultural identity among Indigenous and Black people — and that white and brown people, for example, do not have the same shared identity. Through a common shared experience and a history influenced by oppression and injustice — where erasure of original tribe or country identification meant the formation of a new collective identity — Black people have a common identifiable community, entrenching the need for capitalization; indeed, it is a [cultural identifier](#). Furthermore these communities have made successful requests to media organizations, such as the [Toronto Star](#), to be described as such.

Luke Visconti, Founder and Chairman of DiversityInc., also explains:

“Many Black people describe themselves simply as being “Black,” and this reality is reflected in a body of literature, music and academic study.

I do not believe “white” needs to be capitalized because people in the white majority don’t think of themselves in that way. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with this—it’s just how it is.”

The racialization of religion

The process of racialization can also affect religious communities. Religions are not ostensibly races, but their constituents can often share the same cultural and ethnic heritage. For example, Judaism and Sikhism are both ethno-religions, so acknowledging that these groups can be racialized is important. Alternatively, religions that ostensibly have multiracial constituents, such as Islam, can also be racialized and affected by racism. For example, Muslims may have certain physical attributes, such as a cap, beard, or hijab, that subject them to discriminatory targeting and treatment in [Western societies](#). Hence, anti-Muslim racism is a legitimate phenomenon.

Combating racial myths

When reporting on racial issues, journalists should take the initiative to research, recognize, and combat myths about racialized groups such that they do not inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes about them. Providing sufficient context might preemptively help the reader avoid reaching stereotypical conclusions. It is incumbent on the journalist to engage in adequate research on such matters.

For example, in an article that may discuss Black socioeconomic outcomes, it is incumbent on the journalist to provide context about the particular issue being discussed, so that the root of such outcomes is clear, rather than being attributed to the ‘nature’ of Black people. For instance, how policing disproportionately profiles, targets, and incarcerates Black communities; or how education systems ‘push’ Black students out.

For example, in an article about substance use and policy, it may be relevant to discuss how certain groups have historically been attached to, and racialized through, certain substances, (e.g. Mexican people and marijuana).

For example, in an article about fear and anxiety regarding global disease outbreaks, (e.g. COVID-19, which originates from China, or Ebola, which originated from West Africa) it may be appropriate to contextualize the history of xenophobia and amplified fears in relation to Chinese communities. (Consider Donald Trump calling COVID-19 “the Chinese virus”, or the rise of anti-Black racism, in the case of Ebola.)

Other stylistic guidelines

When referring to a specific skin colour, e.g. “people with black skin,” the colour does not need to be capitalized. This is because it is a descriptor, rather than a reference to a specific cultural or ethnic group.

Stylistically, all groups that are geographically-based, such as Asian, Arab, Irish, or Ethiopian, should be capitalized. These are proper names which describe a geographic location from which a people originates. As such, they should be treated as nouns. It is always better to be as specific as possible, so as not to feed into generalization.

Finally, as aforementioned in “Content warnings and support hotlines” about slurs: it can be integral to the piece to quote a racial slur in order to highlight the severity of the chosen word, and simply to accurately report on racism, even though readers may find it offensive. In these cases, it is important to keep the slur in quotation marks, and add a content warning at the beginning of the article to prepare readers. For example: “*Content warning: quotation of anti-Black racial slur.*”

Civilizational discourse

How not to discuss global disparities

It is important for journalists to recognize how language can reproduce archaic, colonial binaries of “civilized” and “uncivilized”/“barbaric” in their coverage of identity. Journalists should not use such words as “backward,” “primitive,” “underdeveloped,” to describe a society or group of people. Likewise, “developed,” and “modern” should not be used to describe countries.

This is because “development” and “modernity” are contested and ideological labels: while dominant thinking may describe Western cultures and economies as “developed” and “modern,” this may diminish critiques of said cultures and economies, and the viability of alternative, non-Western approaches to culture and economy. Furthermore, such labels construct hierarchies between different groups of people which in turn create racial undertones.

Shose Kessi, a social psychologist at the University of Cape Town, [explained to NPR](#):

“I dislike the term ‘developing world’ because it assumes a hierarchy between countries. It paints a picture of Western societies as ideal but there are many social problems in these societies as well. It also perpetuates stereotypes about people who come from the so-called developing world as backward, lazy, ignorant, irresponsible.”

Usage of terms like “First World,” “Second World,” or “Third World” when referring to countries should be avoided. This classification was born out of the Cold War, and was used to distinguish between those in the Western, Eastern, and non-aligned blocs (which do not exist anymore) and can be considered derogatory. They can be used within quotes or if referring to outdated classification systems.

How to discuss global disparities

Instead, journalists who are specifically trying to highlight economic disparities between countries, should opt for neutral labels as opposed to ideological ones. For example, use the World Bank’s classification of low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high-income countries. For this purpose, we use gross national income per capita data in US dollars. This is a more accurate reflection of the country categorization. Journalists should use the [World Bank’s map](#) if they need to know where each country fits.

Alternatively, journalists may choose to use the “global North” and the “global South” if the intention is to draw a distinction between regional disparities and solidarities, as opposed to specific economic disparities.

When referring to the “West” or “East” as groups of nations or a political force, journalists should make sure to capitalize them. (If they are discussing directions, there is no need for capitalization.)

Indigenous peoples

Stylistic considerations for Indigenous peoples

The Indigenous peoples of Canada consist of large and diverse groups, and every effort should be made to distinguish between different groups, since their backgrounds, culture, and interests will vary.

As aforementioned under the “Race and ethnicity” subsection, “Indigenous” should always be capitalized. Furthermore, “Indigenous peoples” should always be pluralized, since they should not be treated as a singular monolithic group (i.e. Indigenous people). Furthermore, avoid archaic terms like “Indian” and “Aboriginal” when referencing Indigenous peoples, unless they are in a quote. Journalists should give context if and when they do decide to quote these outdated terms.

In Canada, “Indigenous” is a blanket term for three groups: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. “Métis” refers to people of mixed French and Indigenous ancestry, and should be capitalized. Only use Métis as a descriptor of the group or individual who identify as such, since many Indigenous peoples may have mixed ancestry and do not identify as Métis. “Inuit” traditionally refers to Indigenous peoples who live in the northern regions of Canada, referred to as Inuit Nunangat, which means “the place where Inuit live.” Inuit should always be capitalized, and used only if the group or subject identifies themselves as such. “First Nation” or “First Nations” refers to those who are neither Métis or Inuit.

Journalists should strive to describe individuals or communities according to their specific nation or community, as opposed to “Indigenous,” unless they are addressing the aforementioned three groups. When possible, use the name of the community or band (i.e. Ojibwa, Blackfoot, Mohawk, Cree) as it is more accurate and informative. These are always capitalized. Journalists may find it useful to search [a database](#) with the names and spellings of most First Nations communities.

“Settler” is the correct term to identify non-Indigenous people who inhabit traditional Indigenous lands. It is important to avoid descriptions such as “Canadian Indigenous people” or “Canada’s Indigenous peoples.” These are colonial terms and imply colonial ownership. Instead, say “Indigenous peoples in Canada.” Likewise, it may be appropriate to avoid descriptions such as “Indigenous Canadians,” since some Indigenous peoples may not identify as Canadians.

Being historically informed about Indigenous peoples

As *The Varsity* learned from Indigenous Cultural Competency Trainer John Crutch, journalists must be informed about settler-Indigenous history and add proper context when reporting about Indigenous peoples. The Indian Act, Aboriginal title and rights, and the residential school system are among the central historical topics that journalists should consider reviewing. [Indigenous Foundations](#) is a comprehensive resource for historical context to this end.

Journalists should consider the difference between status and non-status First Nations people. Status is defined by the Indian Act, by which the Canadian state has historically governed its relationship with First Nations. Indigenous peoples have a complicated relationship with the Indian Act. As [Indigenous Foundations notes](#):

“The Indian Act is a very controversial piece of legislation. The Assembly of First Nations describes it as a form of apartheid. Amnesty International, the United Nations, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission have continually criticized it as a human rights abuse. These groups claim that the Canadian government does not have the right to unilaterally extinguish Aboriginal rights—something the government could legally do to status Indians up until 1985 through the process of enfranchisement, and can still control through status.

Yet despite controversy, the Indian Act is historically and legally significant for Aboriginal peoples. It acknowledges and affirms the unique historical and constitutional relationship Aboriginal peoples have with Canada. For this reason, despite its problematic nature, efforts to outright abolish the Indian Act have been met with widespread resistance.”

The Canadian government defines: “Registered Indians, also known as status Indians, have certain rights and benefits not available to non-status Indians, Métis, Inuit or other Canadians. These rights and benefits include on-reserve housing, education and exemptions from federal, provincial and territorial taxes in specific situations.”

One of the most pivotal moments in the last decade of Canadian history was in 2015 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its [final report](#), with 94 calls to action. The report reviews the history of the residential school system, which attempted to erase Indigenous cultures and its intergenerational impact on Indigenous children and families. The report described Canada’s assimilation policy, which included the residential school system, as “cultural genocide.” The report is also essential reading for journalists considering Indigenous coverage.

Another important recent moment was in 2019 when the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released its [final report](#), which “reveals that persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada’s staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA

people. The two volume report calls for transformative legal and social changes to resolve the crisis that has devastated Indigenous communities across the country.” On the salient issue of endemic violence against Indigenous women and girls, journalists should consider reviewing the report.

Best practices for reporting on Indigenous peoples

Journalists are encouraged to independently do the relevant research into the colonial history of whatever topic is being written about. If covering a story that discusses topics such as Indigenous education, health care, child care, and mental health, it is important for the reader to know how these present-day challenges and outcome gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are rooted in, and reflected by, historical colonial systems and institutions. For example, the attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples and erase their identity through residential schools, or the contemporary failure of the Canadian government to live up to treaty obligations that were signed with Indigenous peoples.

History also demonstrates why Indigenous peoples may mistrust Western education and health care systems today, along with other state institutions. Allocating space in an article to provide context is therefore important for journalists to consider. Journalists should be careful when it comes to inadvertently perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, such as being biologically predisposed to alcohol and substance use. Instead, they should strive to explicitly demonstrate how they are myths. That is why providing historical context and telling the full story is so important, so that *The Varsity's* coverage does works to actively disprove many of these myths. It is also incumbent on journalists to reflect on their own biases and challenge racism. They should always look for the other side of the story, look up the facts, and challenge ‘common knowledge.’

When speaking to Indigenous peoples, journalists should always ask about their identity, and never assume. Indigenous (legally "Aboriginal") people are composed of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples, and that they are defined by a wide range of cultures and languages. Journalists should identify people they write about by their specific, self-identified nation, rather than generally “Indigenous.”

Journalists should always reflect on their language choices, especially in terms of verb tense and how they frame Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples aren’t just a history; they continue to exist. They were not just victims of colonialism; they are survivors and they have long resisted colonialism. Make sure to emphasize resistance, especially since coverage easily gets carried into victimization. Avoid ‘long ago’ narratives — colonialism wasn’t that long ago. Many colonial institutions and practices remain to this day.

It is imperative for journalists to be aware of the intergenerational trauma faced by many Indigenous peoples. When talking to someone of Indigenous background, it is crucial to be

sensitive to lived experiences, such as residential schools, which can be difficult to talk about and may inadvertently trigger and reproduce trauma for the interviewee.

Journalists are always encouraged to speak to Indigenous peoples at U of T when covering such stories. That being said, journalists should be careful about tokenizing them and their perspectives.

Gender and gender identity

Gender neutrality

As a principle, *The Varsity* tries to keep its language gender-neutral. Whenever possible, journalists should proactively ask their subjects what their preferred name and pronouns are so they are not inadvertently misgendered. When the gender of the referenced person is unknown or undetermined, they should use “they/them.” The same should be done if that is their preferred pronouns. “They/them” can act as both a singular and plural pronoun.

Both “whoever is promoted will have \$50 added to their paycheck” and “the professor said that they felt the findings had important implications” are acceptable. Another alternative is to reword a sentence so that references to gender are removed. “Whoever is promoted will get a \$50 raise” is just as valid as the above sample.

Journalists should avoid using “male” or “female” as descriptors, since the focus should be on gender identity rather than sexual organs. Instead, they should use gendered adjectives: for example, “women scientists.”

When referring to an occupation in general, journalists should use gender-neutral terms. Firefighter, police officer, mail carrier, and flight attendant are all preferable to their gendered counterparts (i.e. fireman, policewoman, stewardess). A generic “man” can often exclude other genders. As such, journalists should avoid words such as “mankind,” “manmade,” or “freshman.” Instead, use words like “humanity,” “synthetic”, and “first-year student.” Also, journalists should avoid ostensibly positive gendered framing that nonetheless perpetuate stereotypes e.g. “Mother Nature.”

Transgender and non-binary coverage

When writing on transgender people, journalists should use the name and pronouns that they use in public life if they didn’t state them at the beginning of an interview. Journalists should not disclose a transgender person’s birth name without explicit consent.

“Cisgender” is the correct term for those who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. “Cis” is an acceptable shorthand where space is an issue (i.e. HEDs and DEKs). A transgender man is someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a man. The

opposite is true for transgender women. “Trans” is an acceptable shorthand in places where space is an issue (i.e HED or DEK).

Gender non-binary/non-conforming/genderqueer individuals have a gender identity that does not conform to the traditional binary of man/woman. Journalists should use them only when the subject prefers it. Do not use the terms “born male/female” or “biologically male/female.” Instead, opt for “assigned male/female at birth.” Do not focus on medical issues (e.g. the genitalia of transgender people) and do not describe transgender identity as a mental disorder.

Someone “is” transgender, non-binary, cisgender, etc. rather than “identifies as” transgender, non-binary, cisgender etc. This is because their gender identity is not a choice to make — it is a fact of their being. In addition, journalists do not need to clarify the gender identity of those who use they/them pronouns in articles they write unless it has direct relevance to the piece they are writing.

Two-spirit (not “two-spirited”) is a term exclusive to Indigenous communities, and traditionally means that the subject possesses both male and female spirits. This can represent both sexual orientation and gender identity. This should only be used when the subject prefers, and not as a noun.

When engaging in transgender coverage, it is important to be cognizant of specific social barriers facing transgender people: for example, they are disproportionately affected by hate violence, face discrimination and poverty, and face barriers to health care. When quoting or referring anti-transgender content, it is important for the journalist to add context as to why that content is harmful. Journalists can find more information about sensitively covering the transgender community through [GLAAD](#).

Sexual orientation

Styling

“LGBTQ+” is the styling that *The Varsity* uses. There is no need to spell out the acronym. Ensure that the “+” is included. Alternative stylings are acceptable if they are within quotes. “Sexual preference” should not be used. Opt for “sexual orientation.”

“Gay” and “lesbian” should be used over “homosexual,” except in a clinical context. Note that gay is an adjective, while lesbian is both an adjective and a noun. Default to lesbian unless the subject asks to be called gay. Avoid terms like “lesbianism” or “transgenderism,” which imply that such identities are ideological.

“Bisexual” is the correct term; do not shorten to “bi.” “Asexual” is the correct term; do not shorten to “ace.” Some exceptions exist, if there are space constraints (i.e. HEDs and DEKs). “Same-sex marriage” is preferable to “gay marriage,” but both can be used. [GLAAD](#) provides a glossary with additional terms.

Terms such as “fag,” “faggot,” “dyke,” “homo,” “sodomite,” and similar epithets should not be used. Some exceptions exist (i.e. the Toronto Dyke March, or if an individual self-identifies as such, as a member of the community.) LGBTQ+ relationships (in any form) should not be construed as inherently inferior to non-LGBTQ+ relationships. Avoid heteronormative assumptions when writing about orientation or relationships.

Combating myths

It is important to recognize and combat myths about the LGBTQ+ community, such that *The Varsity* does not inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes about them. Providing sufficient context may preemptively help the reader avoid reaching stereotyping conclusions. It is incumbent on the journalist to engage in adequate research on such matters. To this end, [GLAAD](#) is a good resource that journalists may wish to consult.

For example, a common harmful myth around the LGBTQ+ community is that they are “deviant,” “diseased,” and “disordered,” that they are less than human, mentally ill, or a danger to society. Whenever a story insinuates these traits, it is important that journalists note that LGBTQ+ being a psychological disorder was discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Also, it is important to elaborate on the harm and stigma this perception still causes the community today.

For example, associating LGBTQ+ people with pedophilia, child abuse, or sexual abuse is a wrongful assertion. There is absolutely no link between sexual predators and the LGBTQ+ community. Clearly outline why this has no substance, how it follows a trend in which minoritized groups are [stereotyped](#) as representing a danger to the majority’s most vulnerable members, and how this continues to harm the community.

For example, insinuating that children of same-sex parents may be worse off than those with different-sex parents is wrong and problematic. When quoting or referring anti-LGBTQ+ content, it is important for the journalist to add context as to why that content is harmful, and how anti-LGBTQ+ activists are actively weaponizing it.

Age

It is always preferable to give an exact age rather than a descriptor. Saying someone is “younger” or “older” is not as useful as saying they are 14 or 94. In the News, Sports, and Science sections, try to avoid the cumbersome styling of “40-year-old Mario, a local plumber.” Instead, write “Local plumber Mario, 40.”

Babies are children who are not yet walking, toddlers are those who are up to but under the age of two, while a preschooler is between the ages of three to five. Men up to age 16 are boys, and women are girls. Young people can be used for those who are somewhat older. The term “elderly” should not be used. Instead, say “older adults.”

Journalists should be cognizant of the types of barriers age can pose on people. This is especially true at U of T, where mature students often face barriers that non-mature students do not. It is important to understand how age makes integration difficult on campus, and how it can intersect with other difficulties, including child care, self-dependence, isolation, and economic issues.

Disabilities

As a general rule-of-thumb, *The Varsity* uses people-first language, which focuses on the person first and the disability second. The method of categorization should not be the focus. As the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities put it, “people with disabilities are — first and foremost — people.”

However, when writing about specific people, journalists should ask what they would prefer. Some members of the disabled community prefer to be referred to as “blind” or “deaf” or “disabled” because they consider their disability to be inseparable from their identity.

The Canadian Press Stylebook suggests an alternative option: Instead of writing “Romanov, who has Cerebral Palsy” say “Romanov uses a wheelchair.” In this way, the writer is not singling out the disability, but are describing how it affects them in a way that will be pertinent to the article. The same rules apply to mental disabilities/illnesses: journalists should use “person with mental disability” unless otherwise requested.

It is better to say “the student, who has a disability” than “the disabled student,” unless the subject asks otherwise. Whenever possible, be specific about the person’s specific condition. It’s best to avoid phrasing that assumes a negative relationship between people and their disabilities; for example, journalists should avoid saying that someone “suffers” from a disability.

[Furthermore](#), there is a difference between having an impairment and having a disability. Impairments denote a difference in ability, whereas disability includes the oppression that is imposed on those with disabilities. Sources might prefer one term over the other, so journalists should ensure that they are using the preferred term. It also important to recognize that disablement is a social process that marginalizes certain traits, which are seen as deviating from the ‘normal’ body type. Being disabled is not an immutable characteristic of a certain group, but a social process being done **to** a group, similar to the process of racialization.

Journalists should not use disabilities as descriptors unless the subject is explicitly diagnosed with them. Someone saying “I’m blind” because they overlooked something, or saying that a government is “handicapped” from performing an action produces stigma and misinformation.

According to the [Canadian Association of the Deaf](#), it is important to differentiate between people who are deaf, the Deaf community, and people who are hard of hearing. Lowercase the words “deaf” when referring to the medical condition, where people have little or no functional hearing. The word “Deaf” should be capitalized when referring to the Deaf community, which

has a distinct culture, society, and language, based on Sign language. Finally, hard of hearing is also a medical condition, where hearing loss ranges from mild to profound and whose usual means of communication is speech.

When reporting on disabilities, journalists should always consider the ways in which institutions and structures in society are not accessible or accommodating, and how that reality can produce barriers for people with disabilities. Avoid approaching stories from an ableist perspective, and consider the often invisible barriers that are placed for people with disabilities.

Journalists should also be sensitive to how interviewees may have differing levels of ability, and including invisible disabilities, and how this should inform the interviewing process.

Sizeism

When reporting on issues related to body weight, it is important not to stigmatize weight or weight gain. While maintaining a healthy lifestyle is, of course, admirable and important, weight is not the only marker of health — instead of weight loss, journalists should focus on the importance of exercise and healthy eating.

[One medical paper](#) encourages patient-friendly terms, such as “excess weight,” to describe people with obesity, and to avoid more derogatory language:

“Obese patients from six diverse primary care practices rated the terms ‘fatness,’ ‘excess fat,’ ‘large size,’ and ‘heaviness’ as undesirable for describing excess weight... The term ‘obesity’ also elicited an undesirable rating... In broaching a discussion of excess body fat and its associated health complications practitioners are encouraged to avoid using undesirable terms -- such as ‘obesity’ or ‘fatness.’ Use of such terms may offend or distress some patients and prevent them from continuing to discuss their weight.”

Furthermore, having excess weight is not a moral failing. It should not be treated as a symbol of laziness or gluttony. Weight is also not necessarily a function of individual choice. This is especially true when considering that the [majority of people who are overweight](#) in North America are both low-income and racialized. Stressors that arise from other intersections of discrimination, racism, fatphobia, mental illnesses and disorders, including eating disorders, and from a lack of time and resources when working low-wage jobs, where overweight racialized people are overrepresented, should be considered in *The Varsity*’s reporting.

Considering this, avoid insinuations that frame being fat as a shameful thing when writing health-related articles. Furthermore, avoid placing an immediate connection between food consumption or lack of exercise and weight gain.

III. COVERING TRAUMA AND STIGMA

Trauma-informed reporting

When reporting on traumatic stories, journalists should consider the words of Executive Director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma Bruce Shapiro in this [CBC article](#). He describes his own experience of trauma and how it had been exploited by the media:

“ ‘I felt that my image had been stolen and that my experience was being exploited politically,’ he said. ‘There is that survivor’s gut feeling that you’ve lost control of the story... and that is a really powerful feeling. That is its own betrayal. It’s one of those second wounds that makes you feel betrayed all over again after a traumatic event.’

Bruce Shapiro is... one of the pioneers in the burgeoning field of trauma-informed journalism – an approach to reporting that respects the pain and psychic wounds of the traumatized.”

Journalists must understand how traumatic stories — such as those of people who have experienced sexual violence, physical violence (whether as an individual or as part of a group e.g. intergenerational trauma due to colonialism, as was described previously under the “Indigenous peoples” subsection, or a genocide), an abortion, etc. — can often be shamed and stigmatized, and must approach subjects who have experienced trauma with the utmost sensitivity and respect.

They must understand the responsibility that comes with a subject opening up to them, and potentially re-experiencing, their trauma. They must report on the story in a way that portrays their experience honestly, without engaging in gratuitous or graphic detail that may reproduce trauma for the subject and readers.

Journalists should avoid engaging in “trauma porn,” which this [Healing Honestly article](#) defines:

“It is the exploitive sharing of the darkest, creepiest, most jarring parts of our trauma specifically for the purpose of shocking others. It can be engaging for some non-survivors because of the shock value, but is not only unhelpful to survivors, but often actually harmful to us because it can trigger our PTSD.”

Hence, journalists must carefully consider their intentions when approaching traumatic stories: are they pursuing the story because it is in the interest of the subject and more generally the public interest, or in the self-interest of producing journalistic shock?

Journalists must also consider how traumatic stories impact them as reporters — and must prioritize self-care too. The Dart Center is a [good resource](#) for journalists interested in how trauma should inform their journalism, and how trauma may impact them as journalists.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence can take different forms: including sexual assault, harassment, and abuse. Sexual abuse refers to instances where a person in a position of power sexually abuses a child, adolescent, or vulnerable adult. Sexual assault usually refers to a single experience in which an unwanted sexual act is performed upon a person who has not given consent, or was not able to consent. Sexual misconduct is more broad, and can cover sexual or gender-based harassment, sexual assault, and sexual exploitation. Sexual violence encompasses all these categories in that it is sexual-oriented behaviour that is harmful and traumatic to survivors.

When it comes to those who experience sexual violence, as with many kinds of violence, “survivor” is a good default term since it conveys resilience. Some may prefer “person who has been subjected to sexual assault.” “Complainant” is appropriate if the subject filed a legal complaint. “Victim” should be avoided as it may stigmatize the individual.

Saying that the survivor “admits” or “confesses” should be avoided, since these terms imply responsibility and shame. Good alternatives are “reports,” “says,” “shares,” and “reveals.” Journalists should use language that conveys that sexual assault is violent and non-consensual, rather than trying to soften the impact or to describe it as sex. “Oral sex,” “sexual activity,” “kissing,” “fondled,” and “caressed” are not acceptable terms.

Journalists should only include details to the extent to which they are strictly necessary for the reader to understand the description of events. Gratuitous detail should be avoided so as to not reproduce the trauma inherent to sexual violence. Use of “alleges” should be minimized. Instead, journalists should pinpoint the accuser. “Police say,” “prosecutors say,” or “the complainant says” are all good alternatives. However, any unproven crimes (that were not indicted by a court) should be preceded by “alleged.”

[Femifesto](#) and the [Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women](#) are good resources for journalists reporting on sexual violence.

Content warnings and support hotlines

It is always important to place a content warning at the top of the article body when appropriate. It is not strictly necessary to place them when discussing released reports or actions undertaken by governing bodies, but is encouraged. It is always necessary when providing in-depth description in the article of sexual violence. It should be italicized, and detail the subject of discussion within the article. The default warning should be “*Content warning: discussions of sexual violence,*” but the content can be modified as appropriate.

It is always important to ensure that support hotlines and resources are posted on the bottom of the article. It should be formatted as follows:

Where to find sexual violence and harassment support at U of T

A list of safety resources is available at safety.utoronto.ca

The tri-campus Sexual Violence Prevention & Support Centre's website is www.svpscentre.utoronto.ca

Individuals can visit the centre's website for more information, contact details, and hours of operation. Centre staff can be reached by phone at 416-978-2266.

Locations:

- U of T downtown Toronto campus: Gerstein Library, suite B139
- U of T Mississauga: Davis Building, room 3094G
- U of T Scarborough: Environmental Science and Chemistry Building, EV141

Those who have experienced sexual violence can also call Campus Police to make a report at 416-978-2222 (St. George and U of T Scarborough) or 905-569-4333 (U of T Mississauga).

After-hours support is also available at:

- Women's College Hospital Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Care Centre (416-323-6040)
- Scarborough Grace Sexual Assault Care Centre (416-495-2400)
- Trillium Hospital Sexual Assault Care Centre (905-848-7100)

Reproductive justice

[SisterSong](#) defines reproductive justice as “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”

Journalists should do their best to ensure that all information on abortion is [reported in a bona fide](#) and balanced manner. This means that untrue claims should not be repeated. If quoting false information, journalists should try to remove it if possible or follow it up with information from a trusted source.

In news reporting, when referring to people who can get abortions, journalists should say “people who are able to get pregnant.” When talking about reproductive rights or justice, frame abortion as a “person's right to choose.” Journalists should then elaborate to note that this category include cisgender women, transgender men, non-binary folks, and intersex persons.

Gender-neutrality is important because groups other than cisgender women can have uteruses and also be affected by abortion.

After elaborating the first time, journalists can stick to a gender-neutral category e.g. “people who are able to get pregnant,” or “a person’s right to choose.” This principle is flexible in opinion pieces, for example, if the writer chooses to frame reproductive justice through a particular gender identity, though section editors should encourage writers to explore all angles of reproductive justice issues.

Here is a [ReWire.News article](#)’s explanation that reconciles disproportionate impact of abortion on cisgender women and the simultaneous need for gender inclusivity:

“Most people who will need abortions are cis women, and the long history of opposition to abortion has been deeply intertwined with sexism and misogyny...

But the second critical truth is that women are not the only people who need abortions: People across the gender spectrum receive abortion care. While their numbers are relatively small—so small that it is difficult to get statistics, for example, on how many men receive abortions each year—they are not insignificant. That they are unintended victims of the war on women does not negate the fact that they, too, are fighting for their lives and autonomy...

[Usage of women-only language] unwittingly [undermines] abortion access for all who might need it, because anything that delegitimizes abortion access for some inevitably creates ground for denying abortion access for all. Even the smallest sliver of an opening becomes something for the right to take advantage of, making it critical to hold a united front in defense of abortion across the board.”

When speaking on abortion rights advocates, journalists should use “pro-choice,” “safe abortion advocates,” or “abortion rights advocates.” Avoid terms like “pro-abortion.” This is because advocates aim to provide abortion as a choice, rather than forward abortion itself. Those campaigning against abortion rights can be referred to as “anti-choice,” “anti-abortion,” or “those who believe that abortion should be illegal.” “Pro-life” or “pro-family” should not be used, because it implies that the opposite side is anti-life or anti-family.

Journalists should recognize the distinction between reproductive rights and reproductive justice. This is because having a “right” to abortion does not guarantee that one can actually get an abortion (i.e. there may not be clinic available, the individual may not be able to pay for an abortion, there may be extreme stigma, etc.). Reproductive justice implies that one has the resources and capacity to fulfill reproductive rights.

An “embryo” (up to 10 weeks gestation) and “fetus” (from 10 weeks gestation to delivery) are both acceptable, while “baby” should only be used after it has been born. Visual journalists

should be cautious of producing images that convey false anti-abortion propaganda and that may reproduce trauma for readers.

Mental illness and substance use disorder

It is important for journalists to ensure that they apply people-first language when reporting, as with physical disabilities. (Refer to the previous “Disabilities” subsection on for details.) Accuracy is key. Journalists should always seek authoritative confirmation of a specific diagnosis. A police officer’s word or a neighbour’s vague assertion that someone in the news had ‘mental problems’ can be problematic.

Similar to physical disabilities, when reporting on mental illness, journalists should always consider the ways in which institutions and structures in society are not accessible or accommodating, and how that reality can produce barriers for people with mental illnesses. Journalists should further be aware of how mental illness is stigmatized in society and how that may require sensitive reporting on the matter.

Whenever possible, journalists should seek to interview persons with mental illness for their stories. Stories about people with mental illness should include the voices of those people. Giving a voice to the people who are actually living the experience makes for better storytelling and better journalism. Including people with mental illness helps break the myth that they are ‘not like us,’ when in fact they are common.

Addiction results from physical changes in the brain, and is considered a mental disorder. Avoid using the term “addict.” Instead, journalists should use “person with a substance use disorder” or “person who uses substances.” Treat such disorders as a health issue, rather than a criminal or moral issue, since it may otherwise contribute to stigma.

Rather than “alcoholism,” journalists should use “alcohol use disorder.” Rather than “drug/substance addiction,” journalists should use “substance use disorder.” Journalists should not use “abuse” when talking about drugs, since this carries a negative connotation for the individual being affected by the disorder. Addiction may coexist with other mental disorders. Addiction can also be associated with hereditary and social factors. Stigmatizing people with addictions can adversely affect their prognosis.

Journalists should not use mental illnesses or disorders as descriptors unless the subject is explicitly diagnosed with them. Saying that a subject “has ADHD” because the subject are restless, or saying a subject “has OCD” because they like to keep things tidy, reinforces stigma and misinformation. Conflating emotions with disorders should be avoided. Sadness cannot be replaced with depression (i.e. “I felt depressed after that midterm”). When in doubt, journalists should replace the disorder with an emotion unless the subject self-identifies or is diagnosed with the illness/disorder.

[Mindset](#) is a good resource for journalists looking for information on reporting on mental health.

Self-harm and suicide

In recent years, the publicized deaths by suicide of four students, along with significant student advocacy on mental health policy on campus, has accentuated the existence of a mental health crisis at U of T. Accordingly, when reporting on mental health stories at U of T, journalists should add the context of these recent events and describe the overall situation as a mental health crisis.

Avoid using the term “suicide” in the headline or subheading when possible. Journalists should also not use the phrase “[committed suicide](#).” This phrasing brings to mind connotations of sin, which perpetuate the stigma around those who attempt suicide or experience suicidal thoughts. It also suggests criminality, even though both suicide and euthanasia are legal in Canada. The one exception is if quoted authorities use it.

Instead, here are some [better terms](#): “Died by suicide,” “Took his/her/their own life,” “Ended his/her/their own life.” Likewise, if someone survives a suicide attempt, do not call it a “failed” or “unsuccessful” suicide. Avoid graphic details when reporting on suicide, such as the manner in which it may have been attempted.

Suicide contagion is a real and worrying phenomenon, and journalists have the responsibility to report ethically on suicides. Vulnerable individuals may be driven to take their own life after encountering news articles, and as such it is important to mitigate any risks to readers by warning them of the content of the article and placing mental health resources to assist those who might need it.

Content warnings and support hotlines

Articles discussing self-harm or suicide that do not already mention such terms in the heading or subheading should always contain a content warning, so as to prepare readers who may wish to avoid the topic, such as “*Content warning: contains mention of suicide.*”

In such articles, it is also important to provide that support hotlines and resources are posted on the bottom of the article. It should be formatted as follows:

If you or someone you know is in distress, you can call:

- Canada Suicide Prevention Service phone available 24/7 at 1-833-456-4566
- Good 2 Talk Student Helpline at 1-866-925-5454
- Ontario Mental Health Helpline at 1-866-531-2600
- Gerstein Centre Crisis Line at 416-929-5200

- U of T Health & Wellness Centre at 416-978-8030

Warning signs of suicide include:

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated, or recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

The more of these signs a person shows, the greater the risk. If you suspect someone you know may be contemplating suicide, you should talk to them, according to the [Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention](#).

Class

Challenging class stigma

Journalists should be aware of how classist descriptions can undermine the dignity of low-income people, and stigmatize their economic conditions. Low-income people and people experiencing homelessness are not inherently, naturally, or deservedly “poor”; rather, economic policies and structures produce many of these experiences. Journalists should be cautious of language that devalues or shames working-class or blue-collar labour, or degrades low-skilled labour i.e. labour that does not require special training. This especially concerns students, who often engage in entry-level jobs in order to finance their education.

Journalists should avoid describing people as “poor” or referring to a group in terms of a noun i.e. “the poor” or “the needy.” Instead, use [people-first language](#). The subject is “affected by poverty,” has “experience with poverty,” has a “low-income” (adjective) or an “income below the

poverty line.” They may be “economically disadvantaged” because of their circumstances or are in a “precarious economic situation.”

In a similar vein, avoid referring to a person as “homeless” or a group of people as “the homeless.” Instead, use “experiencing homelessness” or “moving through homelessness.” It is important to understand homelessness as a set of circumstances rather than a [blanket term](#).

In a city like Toronto, it is important to consider factors that contribute to homelessness. Our steep housing costs, chronic shelter overcrowding, mental illnesses (affecting 75 per cent of persons experiencing homelessness in Toronto), and sexual assault (affecting 25 per cent of women who are experiencing homelessness in Toronto) all contribute to the crisis. [It is also false](#) to say that most people who experience homelessness want to remain in their situation. 94 per cent of them want a permanent home, and 76 per cent say that what they really need to get out of homelessness is help paying Toronto’s high rents.

Marginalized labour

Journalists should consider how certain kinds of labour may be marginalized, stigmatized, and face multiple layers barriers in society, and use their reporting to contextualize these barriers and dignify such workers.

For example, Canada’s policy of temporary migration renders migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation due to a lack of rights and access to services. The [Canadian Council for Refugees writes](#):

“Migrant workers are being used to address a labour demand that is not temporary. It is permanent. Using temporary workers who enjoy fewer rights than permanent residents to fill long-term jobs is exploitative.”

Another important example is sex workers. Sex work is often conflated with sex trafficking, where sex workers are framed as “victims,” leading to advocacy for legislation to abolish sex work. However, [studies show](#) that most sex workers find control and comfort over the work they do. It is therefore important to dignify sex work as real labour and avoid derogatory labels, such as ‘prostitution.’

Wages

A minimum wage is a legal term used to describe a limit on the minimum amount an employer can pay an employee. A fair wage or living wage is an advocacy term used to describe the minimum amount that a person would need to have the basic necessities of life and participate as an active citizen. It is important to distinguish between the two.

Crime

When reporting on crime, it is important to make sure to separate the act or crime from the person, as not doing so may stigmatize the person. People may commit crimes, but they should not be totally defined by a crime they committed or allegedly committed.

Journalists should use “allegedly” for all unproven crimes. Try to avoid [terms](#) such as ‘offender,’ ‘incarcerated,’ (noun) ‘ex-offender,’ or ‘formerly-incarcerated’ (noun). Instead, journalists should try to use “person convicted of,” “person in prison/jail,” “person with conviction for,” “incarcerated person,” “inmate,” or “formerly incarcerated person.” In this regard, adjectives that describe the crime are better than nouns which may essentialize the person: for example, “person convicted of robbery” is preferable to “the robber.”

A jail or detention centre is a facility where incarcerated persons awaiting trial or those sentenced to short terms stay, and are part of the provincial correctional system. A prison, or federal penitentiary, is used to incarcerate those who have a sentence of two years or longer, and are administered through the federal government.

It is also important for journalists to separate crime in the context of disorders. For example, someone might have pedophilic disorder, as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (having sexual attraction toward minors), but not perform the criminal action associated with it. It is important to describe people with pedophilic disorder (or people with pedophilia) with people-first language, and also distinguish between offending people with pedophilia and non-offending people with pedophilia.

When discussing the historical and contemporary crime of slavery, journalists should avoid using the term ‘slave.’ Instead, they should use ‘enslaved’ person or people. Similar to the explanation for the use of “racialization,” “enslavement” is a process that is imposed upon people; people are not, at their essence or by nature, “slaves.” Likewise, use “enslaver” in place of “slave owners.”

Journalists should note that constables on campus are called “special constables” though they perform the same functions as police officers. While journalists should not completely avoid directing readers to the police or special constables if they require assistance, they should keep in mind that many marginalized communities do not feel safe around them. Hence, journalists should try to minimize suggestions of contact.

IV. COVERING PRESSING GLOBAL ISSUES

Climate crisis

In Volume 140, *The Varsity* participated in an initiative called Covering Climate Now, which aimed to strengthen climate coverage of news outlets. As such, it is important that the paper's coverage reflects the urgency of the climate crisis.

Joining media organizations like [The Guardian](#), *The Varsity*'s default terms to discuss the issue is 'climate crisis' or 'climate emergency,' as opposed to the more common 'climate change.' 'Global warming' or 'climate change' are acceptable only when quoting a source that uses the terms. There is an overwhelming [scientific consensus](#) that the earth is warming due to human activity. The climate crisis is real, is happening right now, and threatens dire consequences in the years and decades to come if it is not addressed adequately.

As such, journalists should strive to avoid false balance and ensure that the climate crisis is not framed as a debate or an unfounded argument. Any climate-denying statements should be followed by "falsely." Likewise, "climate skepticism" should be avoided. Instead, use "climate denial." Consider this explanation by environmental scientist [Haydn Washington](#):

"Many climate change deniers call themselves climate 'skeptics'... However, refusing to accept the overwhelming 'preponderance of evidence' is not skepticism, it is denial and should be called by its true name... The use of the term 'climate skeptic' is a distortion of reality... Skepticism is healthy in both science and society; denial is not."

Exclusionary ideologies

When discussing exclusionary political actors or groups, especially ones that promote ethnocentric, nationalist, religious-fundamentalist, or misogynistic beliefs, journalists should try to provide as much specific context with regard to ideology and its impact on marginalized communities, e.g. violence.

For example, when discussing ethnocentrism, it would be better to discuss it in terms of its specific type, e.g. white supremacy or white nationalism. White supremacy is a term used to characterize various belief systems central to which are one or more of the following key tenets: whites should have dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially where they may co-exist; whites should live by themselves in a whites-only society; white people have their own 'culture' that is superior to other cultures; and that white people are genetically superior to other people. White nationalism describes similar beliefs that are usually accompanied by a central desire to define or establish a country or region by white racial identity. Journalists should use their judgement to determine the best description for a group.

In terms of its specific ideology (e.g. discussing religions in relation to extremism or violence), it would be better to discuss it in terms of its specific ideology. For example: Islamism (political Islam); Wahhabi fundamentalism (in the case of Saudi Arabia); Hindu nationalism (in the case of Narendra Modi's India). Journalists should avoid generic political labels, or at least avoid using such labels without qualification e.g. "far-right," "extremist," since these are often relative terms. Journalists should ask themselves: when using the term "far-right," how do you justify it as such? Are you simply describing socially conservative policies, or racial politics?

Hence, journalists should avoid conflating mainstream conservatism, which may refer to a belief in small government, lower taxes, and the framing of social inequalities as results of individual choices, rather than systemic consequences, with extreme/radical right politics, which explicitly advocates for exclusionary policies or violence in relation to gender, race, immigration, among other social categories.

"Far right" is mostly synonymous. However, because some people use the term to also incorporate some aspects of mainstream conservatism, the term is more vague than extreme right or radical right and thus is not preferred. "Alt-right" should not be used, as it is usually a mask for white supremacist and nationalist beliefs since it is a more neutral term. Journalists should enclose the term in scare quotes or quotation marks, if from a quote, or use phrasing such as "the so-called alt-right."

Immigration and citizenship

Journalists should cover immigration issues from a civil, rather than a criminal, perspective. Journalists should not use the terms 'illegal immigrant' or 'illegal alien.' "Illegal" should be used only to describe actions, not people. People are not themselves illegal. If describing a person, journalists should use "undocumented" instead. Journalists should use terms that are legally accurate and avoid racially- and politically-charged labels.

Terms like 'anchor babies' should not be used. Instead, journalists should use "citizen child of undocumented immigrants." "Illegal immigration" is acceptable only to describe a trend, rather than people. Better variations include "living in or entering a country illegally," or "without legal permission."

Journalists should distinguish between voluntary migrants who are generally described as immigrants, such as economic migrants; and involuntary migrants, such as asylum-seekers, refugees, or people who are trafficked. (Involuntary migrants should not be lumped in together under the label of "immigrant," since the latter implies consent.)

If journalists are reporting on involuntary migrants, they should be considerate of the stigmatization and marginalization faced by such groups, especially in the eyes of the law, as well as the social conditions that caused them to become involuntary migrants. Journalists should strive to centre the human rights and dignity of involuntary migrants in their reporting.

The [UNHCR provides guidelines](#) about reporting on refugees which journalists may choose to consult.

When discussing a particular national group, such as Canadians, journalists should make sure they specifically mean Canadian citizens. Discussing “Canadians” generally excludes non-Canadian residents who also live in Canada. Hence, a more inclusive description may be “people who live in Canada,” if that is indeed what is being discussed.