

## **Inclusive language guidelines**

The Company of Biologists journals encourage the use of inclusive and respectful language, avoiding words that describe any person based on factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, neurodiversity or health condition unless scientifically or clinically relevant. Authors should apply these recommendations to ensure that their writing meets these criteria and is free from bias, stereotypes, slang, slurs and cultural assumptions.

The following guidance is taken from [C4DISC](#) (under the terms of its CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license) and, although by no means exhaustive, might be of particular use to our authors. The guidance will evolve and we welcome constructive feedback.

### **General**

Avoid framing the narrative from the perspective of one country/area (e.g. ‘Western’ countries) and biasing the order of lists or table entries using criteria such as race, wealth, sex, etc.

If the race, gender identity, social status, etc. is not relevant, then do not include it. If it is important, then be specific (e.g. ‘Chinese women over the age of 70’ rather than ‘older Asians’).

If quoting an earlier study with outdated historic terms, use ‘individuals previously categorised as Caucasian’ or similar.

If possible, ask the person or group being referred to what term they prefer, as these often evolve.

### **Age**

Avoid the use of descriptions that suggest an ability or a deficiency (e.g. seniors, elderly, etc.). Use the specific age (if known) or a more-general description (e.g. early career, primary school age, older adults, persons over the age of 60, etc.)

### **Gender**

Make sure that correct pronouns are used, e.g. he/she/they. If the details cannot be checked easily, use they/their.

Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex. Gender is a social construct and a social identity. Use the term gender when referring to people as social groups.

Sex refers to biological sex assignment; use the term sex when the biological distinction of sex assignment (e.g., sex assigned at birth) is predominant

### **Global location**

Avoid use of ‘developing countries’, ‘Third World countries’, ‘Arabs’, ‘Asian’, ‘emerging economies’. Be more specific. Possible alternatives to some might be low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high-income countries.

Use USA rather than America.

## Health and disability

Avoid the use of defect when referring to humans (e.g. birth defect). Describe the specific disability or anomaly instead (e.g. birth anomaly). Also consider the phrases 'clinical presentation', 'congenital disorder' or 'congenital anomaly'. [Further guidelines](#) on this matter are available.

Avoid describing body size (e.g. obese), shape or height unless essential to the context. Acceptable when specifically referring to clinical obesity and with animal models but avoid 'fat' as a descriptor.

Use 'person' rather than 'patient' if not referring to the context of medical care (e.g. 'person with diabetes' not 'diabetes patient').

Avoid using 'healthy' as a contrast when referring to human disabilities/illnesses. Be more specific (e.g. 'a trial including 100 people with AIDS and 100 people without AIDS' rather than '100 people with AIDS and 100 healthy individuals').

Use 'anonymized' and 'double-anonymized' rather than 'blind' and 'double-blind' or state that the operator was unaware of the treatment groups.

Avoid the use of 'mutant/mutation' when referring to humans. Use 'variant' instead.

Consider neurodivergent as an alternative for individuals with cognitive/behavioural issues. (And also morphodivergent?)

## Race, ethnicity and religion

Use BCE (before common era) and CE (common era) rather than BC and AD.

Race, ethnicity and religion should only be mentioned if relevant.

Avoid stereotyping and use of umbrella terms (e.g. BAME, people of colour).

Do not use 'native' to describe people, only plants and animals (e.g. native versus non-native oysters).

Some useful definitions, including guidelines on the use of indigenous, can be found [here](#).