

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

2018 | VERSION 2.0



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Respect. Recognize. Reflect.

Dear Colleagues,

Canada's historical relationship with the first inhabitants of the land has been shaped by its imperial and colonial history. One result has been that for many years, Indigenous peoples' respective identities were neither recognized nor respected in mainstream discourse.

This is best exemplified by the fact that all of the Western Hemisphere's autonomous Indigenous groups or nations came to be referred to simply as "Indians," though they were and are distinct from one another linguistically, culturally, politically, and in many other ways. In subsequent years, Columbus's misnomer of Indigenous people as 'Indians' has been superseded by a succession of other terms, such as Native, Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous and others, some of which derive from government discourse and others from international movements.

All of these terms carry connotations that can be functional or harmful, depending upon context, and, their usage by powerful social institutions such as universities makes a real difference.

Version 2.0 of this guide has been produced to help UBC communicators navigate the terminology and meanings associated with this subject in order to produce the best—and most respectful—results, with the recognition that, as time passes, the terminology is subject to change and this guide will need to be refreshed.

Please note that this guide is not a comprehensive treatment of this complex subject, but it is an entry point. Users are encouraged to expand their knowledge on the matter by referring to other sources, some of which are listed at the end of this document.

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Indigenous Peoples: Language Guidelines

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

WHY TERMINOLOGY MATTERS



Why Terminology Matters

1.0

In the history of relations between Canadian institutions and Indigenous peoples, terminology has often been deployed in ways that have been damaging to communities. The terminology used in public discourse has rarely been that actually preferred by Indigenous people, who most often refer to themselves by the traditional name of their specific group.

Using the best terminology in any given situation is not just a matter of being 'politically correct' but of being respectful and accurate.

1.0

1.1 PEOPLES VS PEOPLE

The plural ‘peoples’ can be used to recognize that more than one distinct group comprises the Aboriginal population of Canada. In some contexts, ‘Aboriginal people’ may seem homogenizing, or seem to refer simply to a collection of individuals. In contrast, ‘Aboriginal peoples’ (plural) indicates a broad group that includes a number of separate Aboriginal populations.

For the purposes of style, it is acceptable to use ‘Aboriginal people’ when referring to separate Aboriginal populations, or in contexts in which the scope of reference is clearly aggregated, and then conversely to use ‘Aboriginal peoples’ in contexts in which a recognition of multiple communities, or the diversity of communities, is helpful. The subject and context will determine which is more appropriate, e.g., news article vs. an official report. In any case, the key is to be consistent, or to have a clear logic in each choice.

Note: Indigenous negotiators of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples waged a “Battle over the S” with state negotiators for years. They fiercely and successfully advocated for the term ‘peoples’ rather than ‘people’, as the former (being a collective of distinct groups) have the right of self-determination whereas the latter (in reference to individuals) do not.

1.2 CAPITALIZATION

UBC uses uppercase for the terms ‘Aboriginal,’ ‘Indigenous,’ ‘First Nations,’ ‘Native’ peoples and persons, consistent with the larger global community of specific demographics, e.g., Europeans, American.

Note: As a generalized adjective in non-specific running text, ‘native’ and/or ‘indigenous’ is not capitalized. For example, “milkweed is indigenous to the region” or “he’s a native Vancouverite.”

‘Métis’ and ‘Inuit’ are capitalized.

When part of a formal title, capitalize ‘Chief,’ ‘Hereditary Chief,’ ‘Grand Chief,’ and ‘Elder’.

1.3 TERMS TO USE AND/OR AVOID

NATIVE

Today, 'Native' is a depreciated term, used very infrequently. We advise that you not use it unless there is a specific reason to do so, such as in an organizational name that derives from an earlier period (e.g., Vancouver Native Health Society). 'First Nations,' 'Aboriginal,' and more recently, 'Indigenous' are more current and are preferred by many in the community, though each has particular nuances.

ABORIGINAL

'Aboriginal' is a general term that collectively refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Canada, and is found in the Canadian constitution. It is broad, on one hand, because it includes all Canadian groups, but specific, on the other, in that it is not widely used in international contexts. (In the US, for instance, it is not widely understood.) Though until recently a preferred term, it does, for many Indigenous people in Canada, by the very fact of its use in government policy, carry a negative association, though not nearly as strong a one as its predecessor, 'Indian.' Please note that 'Aboriginal' should never be used as a noun, e.g., 'Aboriginals think...'

INDIGENOUS

The term 'Indigenous' also encompasses all of these groups, either collectively or separately, and is a preferred term in international usage, e.g., the 'U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.' In its derivation from international movements, it is associated more with activism than government policy and so has emerged, for many, as the preferred term.

In some contexts, however, it can be ambiguous: a reference to 'Indigenous people in Canada' could include Maori or American Indian (US) people living here, as well as Canadian Aboriginal people, so in contexts in which legal specificity to people originating in Canada is important, 'Aboriginal,' or a more qualified use of 'Indigenous' may be warranted (e.g., The Indigenous people of Canada).

While 'Indigenous' is increasingly being chosen over 'Aboriginal' in both formal and informal communications in Canada, it may still be preferable to continue to use 'Aboriginal' for the sake of consistency or clarity, depending on the situation. Thus it may be acceptable to use both terms in a formal document or across a communications channel. To avoid confusion, however, do not use both in the same article, unless there is a logical reason to do so.

INDIAN

The term 'Indian' can still be found in use today, but in general, it is a depreciated term with very negative connotations for many and should be avoided in most contexts, unless it is part of a historical reference, part of a legacy term, or used in reference to a government policy or classification (e.g., The Indian Act, 'status Indian,' 'The Musqueam Indian Band'). You may encounter, particularly in legal or policy contexts, the terms 'status Indian,' 'Indian status' or simply 'status.' All refer to the government classification system in which 'status' confers certain benefits (and historically, certain penalties). This is a technical area with sensitivities, so you may want to consult with knowledgeable people before initiating the use of any of these terms.



FIRST NATIONS

Most, but not all, reserve-based communities in Canada refer to themselves as ‘First Nations,’ though some (for us, notably, Musqueam) do not use this term in self-reference (e.g., ‘Musqueam community’ or formally, ‘Musqueam Indian Band,’ but not ‘Musqueam First Nation’). For informal documents, use ‘First Nation,’ or, collectively in referring to reserve-based communities, ‘First Nations,’ but in specific references, use the name that the community (or First Nation) uses publicly, i.e., ‘Indian Band,’ ‘First Nation’ or ‘Nation.’

The term ‘First Nations’ can be applied to individuals, but, technically refers only to those who have Indian status under Canadian law as part of a recognized community. Many Aboriginal people in Canada do not have this formal connection, and those who are Métis or Inuit should never be referred to as ‘First Nations.’

Do not use ‘Indian’ when referring to a First Nations individual! Wherever possible refer to someone’s actual affiliation, and use the spelling the community prefers.

For example: “Barb George is Gitxsan and a student at UBC” is preferable to “Barb George is an Aboriginal student at UBC.” The former is more accurate as well as more respectful of actual identity.

Sometimes, the term ‘Nation’ is more generally applied to a whole cultural group, e.g., “Gordon George is from the Cree nation.” Generally speaking, this kind of attribution should be avoided (“Gordon George is Cree...” is preferable), and in some cases, the attribute of nationhood can be somewhat offensive: for example, referring to the ‘Coast Salish Nation’ could be, as that notion of a ‘national’ grouping is not a traditional part of the culture of Salish communities in this area. Even the term ‘Coast Salish’ is falling out of favour with many since it derives more from anthropology than community self-description.

In any case, specificity adds context and clarity, which makes for a richer story.

To learn more about BC First Nations’ traditional names, visit the BC Government’s First Nations A-Z Listing webpage:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing>

1.4 BE SPECIFIC: MÉTIS, INUIT AND ABORIGINAL

MÉTIS

Métis are a specific Indigenous (and Aboriginal) group in Canada with a very specific social history. Until very recently, they have not been regarded as ‘Indians’ under Canadian law and are never considered ‘First Nations.’ The term ‘Métis’ may be used as singular or plural, and refers to individuals or groups, e.g., “Tom, a Métis student, is attending UBC,” or “The Indian Act does not govern the Métis.”

Please be sure to use the acute accent over the ‘e’ in Métis unless quoting a name or source in which it is not used.

INUIT

Inuit are the third Aboriginal group, historically located in the Arctic and legally and culturally distinct from First Nations or legally-defined Indians and Métis. The singular of ‘Inuit’ is ‘Inuk,’ and because the translation of Inuit is ‘the people,’ it is redundant to add ‘people’ after it.

Do not use ‘Eskimo,’ which the Inuit consider to be a derogatory term.

ABORIGINAL

Be aware that Aboriginal people, however named, do not ‘belong’ to Canada. Therefore, do not preface any of the terms considered above with a possessive, e.g., “Canada’s Aboriginal (or First Nations, Inuit, Indigenous, Métis) people”, or worse yet, “our Aboriginal people.” This is profoundly insulting and not easily forgiven, as it invokes an entire history of paternalism and control.

Do not use ‘Aboriginal’ as a noun, but rather as an adjective. The former, especially ‘Aboriginals,’ connotes an early colonial time when poorly conceived synonyms like ‘Indians,’ ‘primitives’ and others were casually applied to Indigenous people. It is also needlessly reductive, as it unnecessarily diminishes an agglomeration of distinct Indigenous groups to a singularly blunt term.

For example: Do not say “The Aboriginals of Canada...” or “the student is an Aboriginal”. Instead say “The Aboriginal people of Canada...” or “He’s an Aboriginal student (person, athlete, leader, etc.)...”

When in doubt as to what is the most appropriate term to use, ask the person or group involved, learn what is in use in your area or subject field, or simply ask someone knowledgeable.

1.5 OTHER KEY CONSIDERATIONS

RESERVE

An ‘Indian reserve’ is a legally defined geographical area belonging to a community and, historically, to which a community was confined. In general, it is better to refer to a ‘community’ than to a ‘reserve,’ unless the geographic or legal precision of ‘reserve’ is required. Please note that the term ‘reservation,’ commonly used in the United States, is not used in Canada.

TRADITIONAL, ANCESTRAL AND UNCEDED TERRITORY

Use ‘traditional territory’ in recognition of lands traditionally used and/or occupied by First Nations, including ‘ancestral’ for land handed down to subsequent generations. ‘Unceded’ refers to land not turned over to the Crown by treaty or some other agreement.

‘Traditional territory’ almost always refers to a more extensive area than a legal ‘reserve.’ The Point Grey campus, for instance, is most definitely part of Musqueam traditional territory, though not part of the very small Musqueam reserve. And most traditional territory in BC (though not elsewhere in Canada) is unceded, including the Point Grey campus, because very few treaties were negotiated here.

ACRONYMS

For brevity, it is acceptable to refer to a First Nation by its initials but only after its full name has been used at least once in a story, e.g., ‘WFN’ as a later reference to ‘Westbank First Nation’ in a story. Of course, this is not advisable in a story in which two communities would share the same acronym.

POTLATCH AND FEAST

The word ‘potlatch’ is derived from Chinook Jargon and essentially means ‘to give away’ or to gift something to someone at a ceremonial feast. Potlatches are the traditional ways in which many forms of interactions have been formalized and confirmed along the coast for centuries. Historically, the “Potlatch” practice was banned for many years under the Indian Act, thus the term became generally known in this and in anthropological contexts. Nevertheless, the practice is not universally described as such. For instance, a community that currently holds these events may well prefer the term ‘feast’ instead of ‘potlatch’. Use the term the community spokesperson uses or the one commonly associated with the community or communities in question.

POLES AND POSTS

The popular term ‘totem pole’ is a general term derived from anthropological discourse that is sometimes used by community members. Depending on its purpose, a more accurate reference might be to a heraldic (or crest, family), honour, memorial, welcome, shaming, or mortuary pole. Such poles are characteristics of some, but not all, communities in which carving is common. Other communities may carve statuary figures or house posts, and not ‘totem poles,’ and will find the misnomer annoying if not insulting. The Musqueam sʔi:ɬqəy̓ qeqəṇ (double-headed serpent post) by the bookstore and Alumni Centre, for instance, is a ‘post’ and not a ‘totem pole’ (see Resources, on page 17, in regard to using diacritic characters for Musqueam terms). When possible, it is a good practice to determine what kind of pole or post is being discussed.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND RECOGNITION



2.0

2.1 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The UBC Point Grey campus is situated on the traditional territory of the Musqueam people, and UBC's other Vancouver operations are situated on the territory best regarded as shared by the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. The Okanagan campus is situated on the traditional territory of the Okanagan people. It is now a common practice at public and private university events, important business meetings, and in formal documentation, to acknowledge these relationships, as appropriate to the specific location.

The following acknowledgments are some common ways in which this is done. They can also serve as a guide for your own unique acknowledgment. It is, of course, most important that recognition of territory and these relationships not be or appear to be nominal or pro forma. The way to avoid that is for people making the recognition to think about why they are doing it, and to do what they can, even in a brief statement, to convey that it has a real purpose.

WRITTEN RECOGNITION

Point Grey Campus:

- We acknowledge that the UBC Point Grey campus is situated on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam people.
- *Alternative:* We acknowledge that the UBC Point Grey campus is situated on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam).

Note: In the second version the traditional spelling of 'Musqueam' is used, a practice that is increasingly being followed across campus (to render the spelling, see the Resources page for a link to the First Nations Unicode font), and that 'people' does not follow 'Musqueam.' In the latter instance, it is acceptable to leave out 'people' as 'Musqueam' translates to "People of the River Grass," thus it can be seen as redundant.

Downtown Vancouver Campus:

- We acknowledge that UBC (Robson Square, VGH, etc.) is situated on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples (*unceded, etc., optional. For the reason noted above, you may choose to leave out 'peoples'.*)

Okanagan Campus:

- The UBC Okanagan campus is situated on the territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

ORAL RECOGNITION

Point Grey Campus:

- I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered today on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam (people).

Downtown Vancouver Campus:

- I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered today on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh (peoples). *(Note: The anglicized pronunciation of Tsleil-Waututh is 'slay-wah-tooth'. Sometimes you will hear people say 'Coast Salish', but we recommend naming the communities: 'Coast Salish' is regarded by some in communities as a depreciated anthropological term.)*

Note: As with 'Musqueam,' the translations for Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh are "People of the Sacred Water" and "People of the Inlet," respectively. Thus, it is acceptable to not use 'people(s)' when referencing these First Nations. At this point, however, including it is still acceptable as it helps those unfamiliar with these First Nations to know that groups of people are being referenced.

Okanagan Campus:

- We respectfully acknowledge the Syilx Okanagan Nation and their peoples, in whose territory we stand and are gathered upon today. *(Note: The anglicized pronunciation of Syilx is 'say-el-ks'.)*

2.2 ACKNOWLEDGMENT RESOURCES

To learn more, view the short video, *Why We Acknowledge Musqueam Territory* (<http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/community-youth/musqueam-and-ubc/>).

You may also refer to UBC Ceremonies' *Guidelines — Acknowledging the Musqueam First Nation at Ceremonies and Events* (<http://ceremonies.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2010/10/Guidelines-Musqueam-Mar-2015.pdf>).

2.3 A NOTE ON IMAGERY

Indigenous artworks almost always contain culturally significant iconography associated with important stories. Attribution helps to avoid the trivialization of these artworks, and it avoids the fact or appearance of appropriation (see example below).

In general, video, photographic and graphical representations of Indigenous-related artworks should be attributed to the artist, along with Indigenous affiliation and the artwork's name and location. In most instances, permissions for use should be secured if the work is not in the public domain (as it might be, for instance, if it appeared in news coverage of a public event). In some cases, it may be advisable to seek advice from the artist or the artwork's custodian to ensure an artwork's image is used in a manner consistent with its intended purpose.

- Example: "The Respect to Bill Reid Pole," James Hart, Haida, Totem Park, MOA

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EVOLVING COMMUNICATIONS



Evolving Communications

3.0

As with any living, adaptive language such as English, the 'rules' are in constant evolution and adjustment are part of the multi-faceted world the language strives to represent. We have seen, in the past few years, for instance, a very rapid rise in the use of 'Indigenous' in both publications and in usage by community members.

So if you are feeling less-than-confident in using certain terms in reference to Indigenous peoples, keep in mind that fear of using the 'wrong' word should never stifle important dialogue and discussions that need to be had. And please do not be insulted or defensive if someone suggests a correction, but do try to understand the logic of the suggested change.

While nuances can be challenging to understand and navigate at times, every effort should be made to be specific and use the correct word in any given context.

As UBC communicators, the goal is to provide consistent, clear language with the objective of being respectful, non-hierarchical and inclusive at all times.

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SOURCES AND RESOURCES

4.0

RESOURCES

INAC Words First

- Explicitly composed for style and word usage
- In-depth
- Lots of examples (do's and don'ts)
- Supplementary role as a glossary

RIIC Lexicon and Terminology

- Good, broad strokes
- Refers back to SABAR for most points
- Not substantial as a stand-alone guide

Library and Archives Canada Research on Aboriginal Heritage Terminology Guide

- Thorough glossary and terminology
- Not a style guide
- Good for background and historical reference

If you are in need of a font that supports all the Indigenous languages of the Americas, we suggest using Huronio. To obtain Huronio, please contact Ross Mills at ross@tiro.com.

Additionally, UBC Brand and Marketing, in consultation with members of the Musqueam community, has created many diacritic characters for typesetting Musqueam words in the Whitney font. These are available to UBC communicators upon request.

Another option is to install the First Nations Unicode Font, which allows you to render certain characters used in First Nations languages in your preferred font.

SOURCES

This guide was informed by existing resources at UBC:

- Indigenous Foundations
- UBC Style Guide (former)

THANK YOU

Thank you to Linc Kesler, former director of the UBC First Nations House of Learning and Senior Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs and Kevin Ward, research and communications officer from the First Nations House of Learning at UBC for advice and written input on the creation and update of this guide.

PHOTOGRAPHY DESCRIPTIONS

Cover, "Thunder", Thomas Cannell, Musqueam, UBC Point Grey Campus (Photo credit: Kevin Ward);

Table of contents, Installation of Reconciliation Pole, Hereditary Chief 7idansuu (James Hart), Haida, at UBC Vancouver (Photo credit: Paul Joseph);

Page 2, Cole Daley, Chawathil First Nation (Photo credit: Paul Joseph);

Page 11, Story Poles, Les Louis, Okanagan Nation, UBC Okanagan Campus (Photo credit: Don Erhardt);

Page 14, Adina Williams (I), Squamish, and Jessica La Rochelle, Stó:lō, at the UBC First Nations Longhouse (Photo credit: Paul Joseph);