
INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES

INDIGENOUS TERMINOLOGY GUIDE

2021



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Human Rights,
Equity and Inclusion
Indigenous Initiatives

LANGUAGE MATTERS

First Nations, Inuit and Métis terminology guidelines for usage.

INTRODUCTION

There are many terms associated with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. These have evolved over time and are continuing to evolve. It is important to be respectful of this diversity and refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals and communities with the terms that most closely describe how they want to be identified.

It is also critical to learn and acknowledge that certain terms have been used to belittle, oppress and erase First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and their cultures. Utilizing culturally responsive language supports collective efforts toward decolonization and reconciliation.

This guide covers terminology in use at the University of Waterloo.



DO

Capitalize the terms **Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit and Métis.**

DON'T

Use "Indigenous Peoples" to refer to First Nations, Inuit or Métis peoples separately.



FIRST NATION(S)

First Nation is a term used to identify Indigenous people of Canada who are neither Métis nor Inuit. This term came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the term "Indian" and "Indian band" which many find offensive.

DO'S FOR THE TERM "INDIAN"

- Use in direct quotations.
- Use when citing titles of books, works of art, etc.
- Use in discussions of history where necessary for clarity and accuracy.
- Use in discussions of some legal/constitutional matters requiring precision in terminology.
- Use in discussions of rights and benefits provided on the basis of Indian status.



Although First Nations has replaced "Indian" in common language, there are some legal reasons for its continued use due to its inclusion in the Constitution Act of 1982 and the Indian Act. "Indian" is the term used in the Indian Act and is the legal identity of an Indigenous person registered under the Act.

First Nations people include Status, Treaty or Registered Indians, as well as non-Status and non-Registered Indians. The term First Nation is also acceptable as both a noun and a modifier. It can be used to refer to a single band or the plural First Nations for many bands. The term First Nation is also used to refer to federally recognized communities in place of the term reserve.

INUIT

Inuit are an Indigenous people living primarily in Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland. Inuit Nunangat is comprised of four Inuit regions in Canada: the Inuvialuit Settlement Regions (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Québec), and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador). In total, approximately 64,235 Inuit live in Canada.

The majority of their population reside in 51 communities spread across Inuit Nunangat and they have lived in their homeland since time immemorial. According to the 2016 census, there are 3,860 Inuit living in Ontario.

The term Inuit translates to "the people" in Inuktitut, the Inuit language. Therefore, saying "Inuit people" is redundant. Inuktitut is also one of the strongest Indigenous languages in Canada with about 60% of Inuit reporting an ability to speak the language.

DO

- Use Inuk when referring to an individual Inuit person.
- Use Inuuk when referring to two people; for three or more people, use Inuit.



DON'T

- Use the term Eskimo unless you are referring to the Indigenous population of Alaska. However, some people consider its usage unacceptable, largely since it is a colonial name imposed by non-Indigenous people.



MÉTIS

Métis are a distinct people with a unique history, culture, language, and territory. They are descendants of individuals born of relations between First Nations people and European settlers. While the initial children of these unions were individuals who simply possessed mixed ancestry, subsequent intermarriages between these individuals resulted in the creation of the Métis Nation.



DO

Use the acute accent on the é.

DON'T



Use Métis as a generic term for people of mixed First Nations ancestry.

The Métis National Council adopted the following definition of "Métis" in 2002: "Métis" means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Indigenous Peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation. Some people may refer to themselves as Métis but upon further research, they might fit more into non-status Indian or First Nation than Métis.

The Métis are primarily known for speaking Michif, the official language of the Métis Nation. In earlier generations, the Métis were probably the most multilingual people in Canada as they spoke their own languages in addition to a variety of First Nations and settler languages. Other Métis languages include French Michif, Northern Michif and Bungi (a Cree/Scots-Gaelic Creole).

ABORIGINAL AND NATIVE

Aboriginal and Native are outdated collective terms referring to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. However, the term Aboriginal is still used due to its legal use in the Canadian Constitution. Aboriginal and Native have largely been replaced by Indigenous, which is used internationally.

While some Indigenous people may refer to themselves as Aboriginal or Native, that doesn't give non-Indigenous people license to do so.

Use these terms when working with organizations such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and the Native Women's Association of Canada or when an individual self identifies using these terms.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

While the term Indigenous has become more commonly used around the world, it is contested by some because it does not acknowledge the unique identities or distinct rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Always refer to the specific group (First Nations, Inuit or Métis) rather than generalizing with a collective phrase like Indigenous.

PUNCTUATION

Avoid using possessive phrases such as "Canada's Indigenous Peoples" or "our Indigenous Peoples" as that has connotations of ownership. An alternative could be "Indigenous Peoples of Canada".

PUNCTUATION (continued)

Always capitalize Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation, Inuit and Métis as a sign of respect; the same way that English, French, Spanish, etc. are capitalized. Also, capitalize the word Peoples if it comes after the terms Indigenous or Aboriginal (e.g., Indigenous Peoples). Including the word Peoples recognizes that there is more than just one group of Indigenous individuals.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

Language is important because it frames the ways in which we think about the world. Speaking, writing, and reading are integral to everyday life, where language is the primary tool for expression and communication. Becoming more aware of the words and phrases that we unconsciously choose and combine can help us better understand our own biases. By intentionally calling out antiquated language, we hope to encourage more Canadians to consider the ways in which they think about Indigenous Peoples in this country.

THE GOLDEN RULE

When in doubt, it's always best to ask how someone identifies themselves and what they would like to be referred to as.

CONTACT US

As you review this guide, if you know of other terminology that we have missed or if you have any questions, please contact us by email:

IndigenousInitiatives@uwaterloo.ca

For more Indigenous resources, please visit the Indigenous Initiatives website.

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