

Guide on communicating inclusively about race and ethnicity

We recognise that language is constantly evolving, and that staff and students hold strong and differing opinions about the usage of certain terminologies, particularly when referring to race and ethnicity. We will therefore continue to consult with our communities as we refine our approach to writing about ethnicity and race and will endeavour to update this guide to reflect the outcome of future dialogues.

While there is no one set of terms that fits all, this resource aims to help members of the University community to have a more informed decision in using race-related terminologies for various contexts.

1. General definitions

Race and ethnicity are frequently used interchangeably; however, they are not the same.

- 1.1 **Race** is a social construct used to categorise groups of people, usually based on perceived physical characteristics or shared ancestry.

“Race’ is a social construct. Its changing manifestations reflect ideological attempts to legitimate domination in different social and historical contexts. Racism is therefore not about objective measurable physical and social characteristics, but about relationships of domination and subordination.”

([Bhavnani, Mirza and Meeto, 2005](#), p.15)

- 1.2 **Ethnicity** refers to shared cultural expression among a group of people, such as traditions, customs and language.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) defines the protected characteristic of race as encompassing colour, ethnic or national origin, or nationality.

(NB. [Indigeneity](#) is another category of identity that may be relevant in international contexts.)

2. Core principles when communicating about race and ethnicity

- 2.1 **Only refer to people’s ethnicity (or race) if it is relevant to the context in which you are writing.** When it is relevant to refer to the ethnicity or race of an individual, it is good practice to ask the person how they would like to be described before writing about them. Respect how the person (or group) describes their identity.

- 2.2 **Wherever possible, be specific.** The use of umbrella terms (see ‘Broad Terminology’) can homogenise communities and overlook their diverse experiences and needs. Where possible, be specific about the community or people in question. Exceptions to this include: (a) where the data we are using has grouped multiple communities together; (b) where sharing specific details could identify or put participants at risk of harm.

Be clear and specific when you are writing about or to international audiences on subjects of ethnicity or race, as the terminology used in other countries will not be the same as in the UK.

2.3 Identity is extremely personal. If you are writing about or to a particular person, use the language with which they identify themselves. If in doubt, you should ask about preferences, where possible. Always avoid and seek to challenge offensive terminology, racial slurs, and any language that uses racial or ethnic stereotypes.

In the context of groups, use the language preferred by the group. We are mindful that there may not be universal consensus around terminology and our usage of terms is based on the advice of our communities, who were co-producers of this guide.

3. Using broad terminology

The University recognises the diverse experiences of multiple ethnicities, and we want to reflect this in our writing. When using broad terms, it is good practice to explain why a particular term has been used and to acknowledge its limitations, to create a shared understanding with your audience.

While there is not a universally supported set of collective terms, below are examples and descriptions of commonly used broad terms at Durham University. It is important to note that the use of these terms depends on the context in which one uses them, why they are being used and how one has decided which term/s to use.

3.1 BAME (*Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic*)

At Durham, we continue to use the acronym BAME as a broad term – e.g. for data collection, reporting, or bringing different groups together for purposes such as anti-racism. Our staff group (BAME Network), for example, continues to use this term.

In the context of data (statistics) and research, we adopt BAME as a commonly used term to ensure consistency with other public bodies and to benchmark against their data. However, we are aware of the limitations of this term and try wherever possible to put information in context, or disaggregate the data where relevant and possible.

When using the BAME acronym, it is advisable to write it in full at first use, as research has found many also do not understand what they stand for. All letters of the acronym need to be in uppercase — avoid writing ‘Bame’, which implies it is a distinct word or identity, or pronouncing it as a word.

3.2 Person/People of Colour

In the UK and in other parts of the world, the use of the phrase 'coloured people' was historically associated with racist and colonial attitudes. However, within the context of the civil rights movement in the United States, this took on a different meaning, with 'person or people of colour' introduced as an alternative to the term 'minority ethnic'.

The phrase 'person/people of colour' is widely used in the United States and is now increasingly being accepted within the UK, as it moves away from the use of 'minority' and expresses affiliation with global anti-racist struggles. At Durham, our student group (Durham People of Colour Association) continues to adopt this phrase.

3.3 Minority Ethnic or Minoritised Ethnic

'Minority ethnic' recognises the fact that everyone has an ethnicity, but some people are minoritised by society or systems. In comparison, the term 'ethnic minority' puts the emphasis on 'ethnic' – a term which has become synonymous with 'non-White' in the UK and can have negative connotations.

'Minoritised ethnic' (or the similar term 'racially minoritised') has been recommended more recently as it recognises that individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities. It also better reflects the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population.

Remember that the term 'minority ethnic' uses 'minority' in a UK context and that many ethnic groups will not be minoritised in other national contexts.

3.4 Racialised Minorities (or Communities) / Racially Minoritised Individuals (or Groups / Communities) / Negatively Racialised Communities

Similar to the term 'minoritised ethnic groups', proponents of the term 'racialised minorities' and 'racially minoritised' argue that instead of positioning racialised groups and individuals as minorities, it highlights racialised categorisation processes. As such, it underscores the fact that race is socially constructed and (re)produced through such processes.

While this term has been increasingly used across the University and the sector, critics view it as a passive description suggesting a lack of agency in that it defines individuals by what is done to them rather than providing a positive sense of identity.

3.5 Global Majority

This term has been considered a more positive affirmation of the majority representation of 'minority ethnic groups' in a global context and has been increasingly used within (including Durham University) and beyond the HE

sector. This term may be considered as better understood and supported by international staff and students who are not a minority ethnic group in their country or continent of origin.

3.6 Black or Politically Black

Historically, the term 'Black' and 'politically Black' have been used to refer to all minority ethnic communities or African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean communities, particularly in 20th century Britain. This is often to demonstrate solidarity with the shared historical and contemporary experiences of racism. At Durham, the use of this term has been increasingly supported by some staff members.

4. Using specific terminology

- 4.1 Capitalise names of all ethnic groups – for example, 'Black', 'South Asian', 'Irish Traveller', 'Chinese'. Capitalisation can be perceived as a sign of respect; and for some ethnic groups, it reflects a shared sense of identity and community. There are varied approaches and perceptions regarding the capitalisation of 'white' among staff and students. We will continue to consider how usage and thought evolve.
- 4.2 Consider whether it is more appropriate to use language such as 'students from Black backgrounds' rather than 'Black students', as some people prefer to put the person first and their ethnic group afterwards.
- 4.3 Do not use racial or ethnic terms as nouns, such as 'Blacks' or 'Asians'. Use adjectives instead: 'Black people', 'people from Asian backgrounds' or 'people who identify as Black'.
- 4.4 Consider using 'background' or 'heritage' to refer to an ethnic group that someone identifies with.
- 4.5 Remember that some people identify with more than one ethnic group or a mixed ethnic group. Use 'people of mixed heritage' or 'people of mixed background' rather than 'mixed race people'. Other commonly accepted terms are 'dual heritage', 'biracial' and 'multiracial'.
- 4.6 Do not hyphenate compound adjectives or nouns such as 'African Caribbean', 'African American', 'Black British'.
- 4.7 Use 'African Caribbean' rather than 'Afro Caribbean'.

5. Additional considerations

- 5.1 When writing about a country or place, it is advisable to be as specific as possible. Avoid writing about continents or broad geographical areas, such as Africa or Asia, as a country of monoculture.

5.2 Caution should be taken when referring to countries, cities and places that have changed names. When writing about a place, consider the name in current usage (e.g. Beijing not Peking; East Asia not Far East; etc).

When working with historic documents or historical information, it is advisable to explicitly reference the change in names. Where a place name is contested, take into account usage, context, and audience.

5.3 The term 'antisemitism' is written without a hyphen. As noted by the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#), the unhyphenated spelling is favoured by many scholars and institutions in order to dispel the idea that there is an entity 'Semitism' which 'anti-Semitism' opposes.

References, resources and further information

A number of resources and guides from across the sector (e.g. Bristol, Edinburgh, Imperial College London, Leicester, etc.) were drawn upon throughout the development of this guide's first iteration. This [stimulus paper on the acronym 'BAME'](#) was also a useful starting point.

If you need a list of ethnicities for data collection or reporting (for example, providing choices in a form), you can use [this list from the Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#). There is also a list of ethnic groups on the gov.uk website. Advance HE has also published useful [guidance on the collection of diversity monitoring data](#).

Should you wish to learn more about our ongoing work on race equality at Durham University or are looking to develop your understanding of inclusion, please visit our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) pages](#). Further information on available anti-racism training can also be accessed through our [EDI Learning and Development SharePoint site](#).

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