

Society relies on language to communicate ideas and share information, but as with most things, language can be used positively or negatively.

Unfortunately, language cannot be regarded as a neutral or unproblematic medium.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can experience language in negative ways, when it articulates the speaker's unconscious bias, discrimination, prejudice, or racism.

This document aims to clarify and inform the reader of appropriate uses of language and terms in relation to Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people/s.

Appropriate and Inappropriate References and Terms

Appropriate Terms	Less Appropriate Terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Indigenous Australian people/s▪ Aboriginal people/s▪ Aboriginal person▪ Torres Strait Islander people/s▪ Torres Strait Islander person▪ First Nations person▪ First Nations people/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Aborigines or the Aborigines▪ Aboriginal, Aborigines▪ Blacks▪ Coloured▪ Native/s or the Native/s▪ Part-Aborigine▪ 'full-blood', 'half-caste', 'quarter-caste'▪ 'octoroon', 'mulatto', 'hybrid'



There are also several slang terms that are still in use in modern vernacular, which are deemed to be racist and offensive.

It is important to always keep in mind that different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have different ways of self-referral; for example, some people dislike the word Indigenous, as it can hark back to a time when Aboriginal people were included in the flora and fauna act.

The best way to find out is to politely ask.

Words that can be offensive to some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be terms that others use for self-identification such as 'Aborigine'. You may even see it in mainstream media, articles and papers, this does not, however this does not allow you to use that term(s).

Capitalising

The following words should **always** be capitalised:

- Indigenous
- Aboriginal
- Traditional Owners
- Traditional Custodians
- First Nations peoples
- Country
- Elders
- Dreaming (as in "our Dreaming")

Professor Mick Dodson explains:

“When we talk about traditional ‘Country’...we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians...we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area, and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations.” (Dodson, M. 2019. Reconciliation Australia.)

Decolonising Your Language

Decolonising is replacing the language of oppressive power structures with more appropriate terminology to show a cultural awareness of and respect for First Nations people and their land.

As we go forward and attempt to decolonise, your use of language in day-to-day vernacular can be invaluable.

For example:

Colonised Language	More Appropriate Language
Settled	Invaded
Discovered	Occupied/Colonised
Chief	Elder

The terms below apply to the land **and** the people born in or having connections to that Country.

Colonised Word	Indigenous Word
Ayers Rock	Uluru
Victoria	The Kulin Nation
Shepparton	Yorta Yorta and Bangerang people
Melbourne	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people
Bendigo	Dja Dja Wurrung people
Mildura	Latji Latji and Barkindji people
Albury-Wodonga	Dhudhuroa and Wiradjuri people

Indigenous Language map

The link below will take you to the Indigenous Language map (Horton, 1996).

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>

This resource is invaluable for Acknowledgements of Country.



As an exercise, look up on the map where you were born, have lived or have visited in Australia and find out whose Country it is.

Reference

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans/faqs/> (Retrieved, 2020)

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/language-guide-1.pdf>
(Retrieved, 2020)