

# OLA Fairness to All Guide

## Communicating with Respect



**OPEN  
LEARNING  
AGENCY**

Canada's  
Lifelong Learning Provider

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This document has been approved for use throughout the Open Learning Agency. It is one of several guides in the OLA Guidelines Series. There are three principal guides in the series:

- OLA Editorial Style Guide
- OLA Fairness to All Guide
- OLA Copyright Guide

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If you plan to read no more . . .  
at least read this:

To communicate with respect,  
we who are the Open Learning Agency:

- Treat people as individuals.
- Call groups what they call themselves.

Now please read the rest.

## The Principle of Fairness

**Why “guidelines”?** The guidelines in this *OLA Fairness to All Guide* are intended to be enabling—not narrowly prescriptive. They were developed by the Open Learning Agency (OLA) community for the OLA community to help us put fairness into practice with greater confidence when we communicate through OLA media or person to person.

### Diversity and Individuality

**Diversity** Through OLA materials and broadcasts, we communicate with diverse groups of people. We aim to be welcoming to all of them in order to be fair to all—and to increase the likelihood that our messages will be heard.

**Individuality** We also keep in mind that our many audiences are more than groups. They consist entirely of individual persons, and the individual is important. In our communications, we intend to treat the individual with respect.

**Self-check questions** As a self-check, we can ask ourselves questions like these:

- Would I like to be treated in this way?
- Would these persons approve of the way I am naming or depicting them?
- Am I respecting individuality? Or am I reinforcing assumptions—stereotyping?

### Fairness Checklist

We aim to be fair in such areas as:

- |                                                     |                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age                        | <input type="checkbox"/> National origin       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body size                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupation            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drug or alcohol dependency | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupational level    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic status            | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal appearance   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic group               | <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophical beliefs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family status              | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical ability      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gender                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Political beliefs     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geographic location        | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual ability       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual orientation    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning ability           | <input type="checkbox"/> Social values         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marital status             | <input type="checkbox"/> Source of income      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health              | <input type="checkbox"/> Spoken language       |

# Fairness in OLA Media

## Visuals

Visual representation is a powerful tool for fairness—or bias. For example, bias is conveyed visually when everyone is represented as slim, white, and middle class. When creating or selecting visuals, we use the Fairness Checklist (page 1) and take further steps:

- Age**  We show seniors functioning in the mainstream of human endeavor—and not usually as physically or mentally disadvantaged.
- Body size**  We show diverse body sizes, and we are wary of stereotypes such as mousy thin people and slouching fat people.
- Disability and ability**  When depicting persons with evident disabilities, we show them in a variety of integrated settings.
- Ethnic group**  We include a spectrum of ethnic groups, but we do not exaggerate physical characteristics to the point of caricature.
- Gender**  We depict males and females in fairly equal numbers, with both genders appearing equally capable at a task or level of authority. We avoid gender-role stereotyping in careers, sports, dress, or appearance.

## Video

The following checklist for creating or evaluating video programs includes points that are relevant to several media.

- Narrator**  Is the choice of narrator in keeping with the subject matter? Does the subject matter call for a female voice or a male voice? Is the accent consistent with the message? Is the speaker a natural part of the narrative, or is the information given as “the voice of god”? (We take care because we know that the narrator’s statements are powerful, especially in voice-over: many viewers will unquestioningly accept them.)
- Sources**  Have comments been attributed to specific sources whenever possible? A symptom of bias is vague attribution, as in:
  - “Experts say. . . .”
  - “Some environmentalists think we should . . . .”
  - “We all know that the typical athlete is. . . .”
- Subtitles**  Do the English subtitles reflect the language level and speaking style of the speakers? Overly literal translation can distort the speaker’s message.

- 
- Statistics**  Have statistics been presented as objectively as possible? The following statements, all based on the same survey, illustrate how statistics are easily slanted.
- “Only 53 percent of Canadians agreed that \_\_\_\_ is usually justified.”
- “A *clear majority* of Canadians agreed that \_\_\_\_ is usually justified.”
- “A *sizable group*, 47 percent, believed that \_\_\_\_ is *not* usually justified.”
- “The results of the survey were overwhelming. *Only 11 percent* were opposed to \_\_\_\_ in all circumstances.” The key word is *all*, because the figure for “some or all circumstances” could be as high as 100 percent and might give a very different impression.
- Since viewers are more likely to retain an emotional message than a statistical message by itself, slanted survey results are sometimes accompanied by a human-interest story that supports a bias. We aim to avoid bias.
- Camera angles**  Have camera angles been used fairly? The camera, along with lighting effects, can emphasize one person’s power and another person’s insecurity by looking up at one and down at the other. This technique is especially biasing if speakers on opposite sides of an issue are shown in contrasting ways.
- Cutaway**  Does the video sometimes cut away when a person appears about to continue a comment? The cutaway, which covers an edit of the speaker, might be a shot of the person’s hands or the interviewer nodding. When used fairly, cutaways allow the editor to remove extraneous material smoothly; when used unfairly, they distort the speaker’s message.
- Settings**  Has a striking setting been used to editorialize? Does the setting detract from the speaker’s message? For example, has a squalid setting been used to undermine a speaker’s credibility? Conversely, has a prestigious setting been used to enhance credibility?
- Visual stereotyping**  Have the “Visuals” guidelines (page 2) been followed? For example, when groups are shown, is the mix of cultures represented in a natural way, or do visible minorities stand out as tokens?
- Visual emphasis**  Has visual emphasis—through action, contrast, duration, or point of view—been used to put a speaker or group at a disadvantage? It is important to envision the entire program, not just the individual scenes, because the effect can be cumulative.
- Balance**  Are the viewers allowed to judge the issue for themselves? To do so, they need balanced material, with the best available advocates—portrayed as equals—for each viewpoint.

## Audio

For interviewers, narrators, leading roles, etc., we aim for a variety of:

- Male and female voices
- Accents, including “foreign accents”
- Ages

## Words

This section focuses on a fundamental bias in words—bias in naming and describing.

- Stereotypes** □ Many phrases that stereotype people are misleading and offensive. These are a few examples:
- “Quaint countryfolk”
  - “Absent-minded professor”
  - “The weaker sex”
  - “Old and doddering”
  - “Boring accountant”

- “Acceptable” bias** □ Bias is sometimes treated as “socially acceptable.” When this guide was first published, for instance, some research and media reports were suggesting that sexist remarks about women were “out” but sexist remarks about men were “in.” For OLA, disrespectful bias is *not* acceptable.

A test of our fairness to all is our respect toward targets of “acceptable” bias such as white males, “Christian fundamentalists,” and “the politically correct.” Significantly, groups would *not* normally identify themselves with labels like the ones in quotation marks.

- Names of groups** □ When identifying a group or its members, we refer to the group the way it refers to itself. If the group has a formal name, we use it.

We avoid identifying a group or its members in terms they might regard as derogatory and/or misleading. For example, we would identify a source as “the president of the Atlantic Lesbian and Gay Benefits Coalition,” rather than “the leader of a left-wing homosexual group.” We would refer to *blacks* (also *Blacks*) or *African Canadians*, not *Negroes*.

When a group is labelled with the prefix “anti” (as in “anti-logging groups”), the name has usually been imposed to imply “negative and narrow.” Groups normally define themselves in terms of what they advocate, not what they oppose.

- Aboriginal North Americans** □ In Canada, the term *Aboriginal* is broadly acceptable and applicable to more than one million Canadians, including Inuit and Métis people. Whereas *Aboriginal* is used in the Constitution, *Indian* is the less broadly accepted term used in the Indian Act.

We also use such terms as *indigenous people* and *First Nations people*—or the name of the particular First Nation if possible, e.g., *Nisga’a* or *Sto:lo*. As usual, we prefer to use the terms that people use for themselves.

Where we need to use the adjective *Native*, as in *Native Indians*, we capitalize *Native*. We are especially careful to distinguish Canadian usage from U.S. usage such as *Native Americans*.

*Note:* Fairness in words, though specifically addressed in this section, is covered in one way or another throughout these guidelines.

## Fairness and Characteristics

### Gender

Gender bias has been so much a part of the English language that it can be difficult to overcome, but tips like the following ones help us to sidestep some of the pitfalls.

**Generic man** The word *man* means a *male person*, but for centuries it was also used to mean *all humans* or *any member of humankind*. In this generic sense, *man* appears to exclude women, just as the word *woman* would appear to exclude men if we used it to mean *all humans* or *any member of humankind*.

<b>Rather than:</b>	<b>Try this:</b>
businessman/businesswoman	business person
chairman	chair, moderator, convenor, chairperson (never <i>chairman</i> for men and <i>chairperson</i> for women)
common man	average person
fireman	firefighter
fisherman	angler, fisher (In the commercial fishing industry, <i>fisherman</i> is still in common use, but <i>fisher</i> appears to be gaining acceptance.)
foreman	supervisor
man	human, humankind, people, men and women <i>or</i> women and men, the individual, person, persons
man the desk	staff the desk
man's achievements	human achievements
man-hours	person-hours, hours, working hours
man-made	synthetic
mankind	humans, humankind, people
manpower	work force, workers
policeman	police officer
postman	letter carrier
primitive man	primitive people
salesman/saleswoman	salesperson, sales representative
workman	worker

**Feminine pronouns for objects** Until a few years ago, all hurricanes were named as though they were female—with women's names only. That has changed, but one might still see a battleship referred to as *she*. It is fair to refer to objects with neuter pronouns such as *it*.

**Generic he, his, and him** We use pronouns that agree with their antecedents in gender and number. We do not use *he*, *his*, and *him* when the gender of the antecedent is indefinite. Instead, we use constructions like the ones in the right column below.

***Rather than:***

If a professor is teaching three courses and doing research as well, he will have little time to supervise graduate theses.

If a professor is teaching three courses and doing research as well, they will have little time to supervise graduate theses.

(OLA usage has been to avoid using a plural pronoun such as *they* with a singular antecedent.)

A five-year-old child could usually walk to the corner by himself.

The average prison guard wants to improve his working conditions.

Anyone who wants his teaching evaluated should submit the enclosed form by December 5.

(Although there is a trend toward treating *anyone* and *everyone* as plural pronouns in some contexts, OLA usage has been to treat them as singular.)

A faculty member and his wife may attend free of charge.

Professors have wives and children to support.

We're looking for a program coordinator who is his own man.

***Try this:***

A professor who is teaching three courses and doing research as well will have little time to supervise graduate theses.

Use *she* or *he* and *he* or *she*, especially when you wish to show that you are including both genders, but be sparing so as not to sound awkward:

If a professor is teaching three courses and doing research as well, he or she will have little time to supervise graduate theses.

*If possible, eliminate unnecessary problems by rewording:*

A five-year-old child could usually walk to the corner unaccompanied.

The average prison guard wants improved working conditions.

*Change from third to second person:*

If you want your teaching evaluated, submit the enclosed form by December 5.

*Or change Anyone to a plural:*

Instructors who want their performance evaluated are required to submit the enclosed form by December 5.

*Revise so that the sentence does not assume that all faculty members are men or that the second person is of the opposite gender.*

Each faculty member, along with one accompanying person, may attend free of charge.

Professors have families to support.

We're looking for a program coordinator with integrity and a sense of independence.

**Stereotyping, trivializing, or demeaning expressions** We avoid expressions that stereotype, trivialize, or demean. For example, we use *woman* rather than *lady*, which is often used to trivialize.

***Rather than:***      ***Try this:***

cleaning lady      housekeeper, cleaner, custodian

coed      student

feminine intuition      intuition

gentleman's agreement      informal agreement

maiden name      birth name

Make an appointment with my girl on your way out.      Make an appointment with the secretary on your way out.

My gal will take care of that.      My assistant will take care of that.

**Derivative terms** We avoid derivative terms for women:

***Rather than:***      ***Try this:***

actress      actor

poetess      poet

sculptress      sculptor

stewardess      flight attendant

waitress      server

**Women or men first?** We prefer to alternate the order of the female and male genders when this can be done without extreme awkwardness.

***Rather than exclusively using:***      ***Try alternating with this:***

boys and girls      girls and boys

he or she      she or he

his or her      her or his

men and women      women and men

**Titles and spouses** The courtesy titles *Miss* and *Mrs.* reveal marital status, often in contexts where marital status is irrelevant. Since *Ms.* is as unrevealing and neutral as *Mr.*, it is appropriate in any situation where *Mr.* would be appropriate—unless the individual prefers to be referred to as *Miss* or *Mrs.*

We often find it preferable and prudent to dispense with courtesy titles. However, some members of the OLA community point out that courtesy titles can be a means for expressing respect.

***Rather than:***      ***Try this:***

Miss Mary Lau and Mr. Dennis Cortez  
are on the committee.

Ms. Mary Lau and Mr. Dennis Cortez  
are on the committee.

*Or preferably:*

Mary Lau and Dennis Cortez  
are on the committee.

Dear Ms. Terry Smith:

Dear Terry Smith:

Dear Mr. Terry Smith:

Dear Terry Smith:

We refer to spouses as spouses when the spousal role is the reason for the reference.

*Spousal role:* Governor General Vanier and Mrs. Vanier attended the ceremony.

*Not a spousal role:* Hilary Clinton is an accomplished lawyer.

**Roles** We avoid gender-role stereotyping of such activities as dish washing, looking after children, taking out the garbage, gossiping, mowing the lawn, doing personal grooming, and watching sports events on TV. Also, we do not describe a man or woman whose occupation is to take care of the home and/or children as a person who “doesn’t work.”

***Rather than:***      ***Try this:***

housewife, househusband

homemaker (which includes both  
women and men and doesn’t  
irrelevantly reveal marital status)

fathering, mothering

parenting (unless the more specific  
role of fathering or mothering  
is relevant in the context)

## Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation that did not conform to the majority orientation was traditionally a subject of “acceptable” bias in Canadian society. In areas like this, we are especially alert to ingrained bias in our communication.

Because respectful communication must be clear to our audiences, we keep informed about new terms in areas such as sexual orientation where the usage is evolving. However, we do not usually pioneer new terms.

- Homosexual/  
heterosexual**  In most contexts, we do not refer to a person as “a homosexual” or “a heterosexual,” as that would imply that the person is one-dimensional. In demographic or clinical contexts, however, we may use the terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual*.
  
- Lesbian  
and gay**  When referring to the individual or the culture, we use *lesbian* for women and *gay* (as an adjective) and *gay men* for men. Since there is no commonly accepted term that encompasses both groups, we simply use *lesbians and gay men*.
  
- Sexual  
orientation**  We use the term *sexual orientation*. We normally avoid *sexual preference*, and we do not use *sexual lifestyle*.
  
- Alertness to  
stereotyping**  We are alert to stereotyping. It would be stereotyping, for example, to use *gay* to imply that a man is effeminate or to use *lesbian* to imply that a woman dislikes men.

*Note:* Sometimes individuals refer to themselves in terms that their advocacy groups regard as derogatory. For example, one might occasionally come across a television story or newspaper article in which gay men or lesbians do this. While we respect persons’ rights to call themselves whatever they wish, we normally use the advocacy groups’ preferred terms.

## Variations in Ability/Disability

**WHO terms** We use terms that are favored by the World Health Organization:

- *Disease* or *disorder* is the medical cause.
- *Impairment* is the resultant loss of function.
- *Disability* is the resultant inability to perform an activity within the typical human range.
- *Handicap*, the inability to perform a role, is a social perception resulting from insufficient adaptation by society and/or by the person with the disability.

Example: A person who has the *disease* of multiple sclerosis might have the *impairment* of loss of leg function. That person's resulting *disability* might be the inability to walk. The person who is unable to walk might appear to be *handicapped* by stairs, despite having adapted to the disability by learning to use a wheelchair on ramps.

**Person first** We also aim to use the terminology preferred by advocacy groups for persons with disabilities, although it is in constant evolution. There is an increasing emphasis on the abilities of persons with disabilities. This is respectful because it emphasizes the positive, and it is in keeping with the reality that persons with disabilities often develop offsetting abilities. Advocacy groups emphasize that a disability does not define the person, and they therefore promote “person first” terms, e.g., a *person with epilepsy*, not an *epileptic*. The trend is toward *persons* and away from *people*.

**Relevant distinctions** We do *not* use terms like *regular students* and *normal persons* to mean *persons without evident disabilities*. We do make relevant distinctions, e.g., *blind* and *sighted*, and *with visual impairment* and *without visual impairment*.

<b>Rather than:</b>	<b>Try this:</b>
AIDS victim	Person with AIDS, person living with AIDS
Birth defect	Congenital disorder
Confined to a wheelchair	Using a wheelchair (A wheelchair enables mobility; it is not confining.)
Crazy/insane person	Person with a mental health disability, <i>or be specific, e.g., person who has schizophrenia</i>
Deaf person	Person who is deaf ( <i>Deaf</i> indicates profound hearing loss; <i>hard of hearing</i> implies less profound loss.)
Learning disabled person	Person with a learning disability, e.g., dyslexia
Mentally retarded person	Person with an intellectual disability, person with a mental handicap, person living with a mental handicap ( <i>Developmental disability</i> , a broader term, refers to mental/physical disabilities with onset before age 22.)
The blind	Persons who are blind ( <i>Blind</i> indicates little or no vision; <i>visual impairment</i> , a broader term, indicates any degree of vision loss.)
The disabled	Persons with disabilities (When using plurals, we are alert to avoid expressing an undue degree of homogeneity. Between disabilities and within a disability, there are likely to be wide differences.)
Ms. Jones, a person who is blind, has a new guide dog.	Ms. Jones, who is blind, has a new guide dog (Adding “a person” would be awkward, not respectful.)

## Interacting Effectively with Persons with Disabilities

There are so many kinds of disabilities and such wide ranges of needs within disabilities that we can't all be experts about them. However, we can find out how to adjust to a person's disability by simply asking the person, who is likely to know a lot about it.

### Tips for respectful communication

We use these tips for respectful communication with persons with disabilities:

- ❑ Be attentive, patient, and encouraging.
- ❑ Communicate directly with the person—not through the person's companion.
- ❑ Keep in mind that most disabilities do not reduce the person's intelligence.
- ❑ If you are unsure how to be of assistance, ask the person. (If the person does not want special help, do not insist on providing it anyway.)
- ❑ Do not become flustered if you happen to use an expression that seems to underline a person's disability, e.g., "you see" if the person you are talking to is blind, and "within walking distance" if the person uses a wheelchair. (Most people, with or without evident disabilities, are not waiting to take offence.)
- ❑ Visualize yourself in the other person's place. When imagining yourself as blind, for example, you will want people to address you in a normal tone of voice and to let you know when they are leaving the room. When "using a wheelchair," you will visualize yourself being spared a stiff neck if people sit down to converse. When "deaf," you may appreciate the opportunity to read a person's lips or write notes.

## Formatting Effectively for a Range of Learners

The formats of learning materials can become barriers for some learners unless we use helpful approaches like these:

- Copyright clearance** ❑ When obtaining copyright clearance, request clearance to provide the materials in alternative forms (e.g., audio, ASCII) for learners with disabilities.
- For visual impairment** ❑ For persons with visual impairment, make print materials available as computer documents so that they can be viewed in enlarged form on a computer screen. Also make print materials, including exams, available in audio and/or in large print, and make labels on audiotapes and videotapes available in Braille.
- For hearing impairment** ❑ Primarily for persons with hearing impairment, enhance video with closed captioning and ample lighting of speakers' faces. These approaches are also useful for many other viewers, e.g., ESL and literacy students, as well as persons with aural learning disabilities. (Because of a U.S. law, most televisions sold in North America have a closed-caption-decoding feature.)  
As needed, provide printed transcripts of audio or video components of a course.
- For hand dysfunctions** ❑ For persons with hand dysfunctions, organize materials in light, easily removable sections or booklets.
- KISS** ❑ *Keep it simple—succeed.* Our design basics such as legibility and coherent modular segments ("building blocks") help meet needs related to many disabilities.
- DSO** Detailed information about particular disabilities, adaptive equipment, special arrangements, and community resources for persons with disabilities is available from the OLA Disability Services Office (DSO).

## Further Guidelines

**DSO service guidelines** Many OLA departments have developed performance standards and/or guidelines for service, including respectful communication by phone and face-to-face. For example, the OLA Disability Services Office (DSO) has developed service guidelines that include the following statement about respectful communication:

**Respectful communication:** Since OLA is in the *open* learning service business, treat the learner as a very important client. For example:

- ❑ When transferring calls, ensure that the transfer is completed. Before connecting a learner to the OLA Disability Services Office, describe the learner's background. If the transfer cannot be completed, provide the DSO with a full message.
- ❑ Express requirements firmly but diplomatically, without saying “you must” or “you’ll have to” or even “you should.” You might explain that “There is a requirement that . . .” in a tone of voice that indicates you are *assisting* the learner to meet a requirement, rather than *imposing* a restriction. If learners do not choose to meet OLA requirements, we may be unable to help, but they do not *have to* do anything—OLA is serving them.
- ❑ Use the *OLA Fairness to All* guidelines.

**Guidelines for creating media** The Open School, in consultation with the DSO and other divisions, has developed the *OLA Guidelines for Creating Universally Accessible Media: A Supplement to the OLA Fairness to All Guide*.

**OLA Library information** Further information about respectful communication is available through the OLA Library. For example, Library staff can assist OLA staff to search databases or obtain interlibrary loans.