

Learning to write respectfully about Australian Indigenous peoples

As a student in an Australian university, it is important that, through your degree journey, you learn to use respectful and appropriate language when writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As you engage with Indigenous issues through your studies and participation in ANU activities, give careful consideration to the words and phrases you use when talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in your essays, reports and presentations. For example, if you use the term 'Aboriginals' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people', you are not accurately reflecting the diversity of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander societies, acknowledging different groups' identities or recognising that different groups have a unique historical and on-going connection to their land. Rather, it is more appropriate to acknowledge different groups' identities and unique historical and contemporary connections to their lands" Some examples of how to do this are provided below.

By adopting the following suggestions, you will not only minimize the risk of offending Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but more importantly, you will be showing that you recognise and respect the diversity and uniqueness of the individuals and communities you are writing about.

- 1) Understand and use the term '**peoples**' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There is a difference between Aboriginal peoples (from mainland Australia) and Torres Islander peoples (from a group of about 274 small islands north of the Australian mainland). Wherever possible and appropriate, use specific terms such as the name of the relevant national language group like Wiradjuri, Bunuba, Kuku-Yalanji or Pitjantjatjara. Examples include:

Professor Juanita Sherwood, a Wiradjuri woman, explains....

Stan Grant, a Wiradjuri man from New South Wales, compares....

Author Alexis Wright, Waanyi woman from the Gulf of Carpentaria, said.....

The Yawuru people are the native title holders of the Western Australian town of Broome.

For thousands of years, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the Australian continent and its islands have...

- 2) Where possible, check with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom you work for their terminology preferences. The term 'Indigenous' is correct and reflects international rights and status. However, some people prefer to use Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander peoples or First Nations peoples. You should never use the term 'Aborigines' in any context.

- 3) Check your grammar! The phrase 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' is grammatically incorrect. 'Aboriginal' is an adjective and should always be accompanied by a noun such as 'peoples', 'communities', 'youth' etc.
- 4) Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel disrespected by the use of the acronym 'ATSI', even though it takes less time to use.
- 5) Avoid the use of 'they' or 'them' where possible as it objectifies and excludes people. Often 'us and them' language makes it seem as if the words 'us' and 'we' does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 6) Avoid using the phrases 'our Indigenous people' and 'our Aboriginal peoples', as this can cause offence given the historical context of colonization.
- 7) Be sensitive to context. The diversity of Indigenous peoples and the varied nature of Indigenous studies at the ANU means that you will need to think carefully about your writing approach in each situation. Always feel free to ask questions of your lecturers and tutors as you develop your writing strategy and ideas.

As outlined in the ANU's Strategic Plan, "as Australia's national university one of our defining roles has been to contribute to the advancement of Australia's Indigenous peoples. We contribute by graduating Indigenous students, as well as through game-changing research and direct engagement with Indigenous communities. We provide an environment for debating the big issues and partnering with Indigenous Australia to advance the status, recognition and lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."

As a student, your engagement with Indigenous issues is important for you as an individual and for the university more generally. It is important to also remember that learning is an ongoing process and your understanding and appreciation of Indigenous peoples will continue beyond your studies at the university.

If you would like to read more about best practice when writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, these are helpful resources:

https://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/10043/appropriate_indigenous_terminology.pdf

<https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/gulanga-good-practice-guide-preferences-terminology-referring-to-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-peoples.pdf>

<https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/about/terminology-guide>

The following references are examples of ways Australian Indigenous peoples, and their allies, write.

Bawaka country, Wright, S., Suchet-Pearson, S., Lloyd, K., Burarrwanga, L., Ganambarr, R., Ganambarr-Stubbs, M., Ganambarr, B. & Maymuru, D. (2015) Working with and learning from Country: decentring human author-ity *cultural geographies* 22(2) 269–283 DOI: 10.1177/1474474014539248

Peters-Little (2004) *The community game* chapter in *The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme* Book Editor(s): F. Morphy, W.G. Sanders (Eds) Published by: ANU Press. (2004) Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jbj2z.26>

Searle & Mulholland (2018) Systems, Self, and Sovereignty: Non-Indigenous Practitioners Negotiate Whiteness in Aboriginal Partnerships *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 9:(1)