



# What NOT to say: LGBT+ Guide

**Offensive: "homosexual" (n. or adj.)**  
**Preferred: "gay" (adj.); "gay man" or "lesbian" (n.); "gay person/people"** Please use "gay" or "lesbian" to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered

**Offensive: "homosexual relations/relationship," "homosexual couple," "homosexual sex," etc.**  
**Preferred: "relationship" (or "sexual relationship"), "couple" (or, if necessary, "gay couple"), "sex," etc.** Identifying a same-sex couple as "a homosexual couple," characterizing their relationship as "a homosexual relationship," or identifying their intimacy as "homosexual sex" is extremely offensive and should be avoided.

As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion or relationship "gay," "lesbian" or "bisexual" unless you would call the same activity, emotion or relationship "straight" if engaged in by someone of another orientation.

**Offensive: "sexual preference"**  
**Preferred: "sexual orientation" or "orientation"** The term "sexual preference" is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured." *Sexual orientation is the accurate description of an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and straight men and women.*

**Offensive: "gay lifestyle" or "homosexual lifestyle"**  
**Preferred: "gay lives," "gay and lesbian lives"** There is no single lesbian, gay or bisexual lifestyle. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrase "gay lifestyle" is used to denigrate lesbians and gay men, suggesting that their orientation is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured."

**Offensive: "admitted homosexual" or "avowed homosexual"**  
**Preferred: "openly lesbian," "openly gay," "openly bisexual"** Dated term used to describe those who are openly lesbian, gay or bisexual or who have recently come out of the closet. The words "admitted" or "avowed" suggest that being gay is somehow shameful or inherently secretive.

### **DEFAMATORY LANGUAGE**

**"fag," "faggot," "dyke," "homo," "sodomite," "she-male," "he-she," "it," "shim," "tranny" and similar epithets** The criteria for using these derogatory terms should be the same as those applied to vulgar epithets used to target other groups.

**"deviant," "disordered," "dysfunctional," "diseased," "perverted," "destructive" and similar descriptions** The notion that being gay, lesbian or bisexual is a psychological disorder was discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Today, words such as "deviant," "diseased" and "disordered" often are used to portray gay people as less than human, mentally ill, or as a danger to society

**Problematic: "transgenders," "a transgender"**  
**Preferred: "transgender people," "a transgender person"**

- Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders." Instead say, "Tony is a transgender man," or "The parade included many transgender people."

**Problematic: "transgendered"**  
**Preferred: "transgender"** The adjective *transgender* should never have an extraneous "-ed" tacked onto the end. An "-ed" suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors. For example, it is grammatically incorrect to turn *transgender* into a participle, as it is an adjective, not a verb, and only verbs can be used as participles by adding an "-ed" suffix.

**Problematic: "sex change," "pre-operative," "post-operative"**  
**Preferred: "transition"** Referring to a sex change operation, or using terms such as pre- or post-operative, inaccurately suggests that one must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.

### **DEFAMATORY TERMS**

**Defamatory: "deceptive," "fooling," "pretending," "posing" or "masquerading"** Gender identity is an integral part of a person's identity. Do not characterize transgender people as "deceptive," as "fooling" other people, or as "pretending" to be, "posing" or "masquerading" as a man or a woman. Such descriptions are defamatory and insulting.

**Defamatory: "she-male," "he-she," "it," "trannie," "tranny," "shim," "gender-bender"** These words only serve to dehumanize transgender people and should not be used.

**Defamatory: "bathroom bill"** A new term created and used by far-right extremists to oppose non-discrimination laws that protect transgender people.

