TRANSGENDER MEDIA GUIDE

iranti

AFRICAN LGBTQI+ MIGRATION RESEARCH NETWORK

DEFINITIONS

Cisgender: To have a gender identity that matches the gender or sex assigned at birth.

Gender Binary: The false idea that there exists only women and men. This idea is incorrect, since people of all kinds of gender exist.

Gender Dysphoria: This describes the discomfort felt by someone whose gender presentation or the gender people perceive them to be does not match their gender identity.

Gender Expression: Refers to the way a person expresses their gender e.g. through clothing and gesture.

Gender Identity: Someone's internal sense of gender. Cis people identify with the gender they were assigned at birth; trans people do not.

Gender Diverse: An umbrella term developed by African communities to collectively describe the many people who identify with and express gender in a range of ways that do not align with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Intersex: An umbrella term that refers to people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as exclusively female or exclusively male. The term is applied only in the context of sex and never in the context of gender.

Misgender: This happens when you assume a person's gender incorrectly.

Non-Binary: An umbrella term referring to genders that aren't exclusively 'woman' or 'man'.

Queer: A contested word in the LGBTQI+ community due to its historical use as a slur. Still, today some people in the LGBTQI+ community have reclaimed the word and use it to affirm or celebrate themselves.

Sex: Infants are sexed at birth (usually by a doctor looking at their body) and put into one of two categories: male or female based on physical characteristics.

Sexuality: How one romantically and/or sexually relates to other people. A person can be lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, and more.

Transgender: To have a gender identity that doesn't neatly match the gender or sex assigned at birth.

Transphobia: Fear and/or hatred and/or violence targeted at transgender people.

SLURS & DEFAMATORY LANGUAGE:

While some people might choose to use one or more of these terms to describe themselves, it is **unacceptable** to use any of these terms to describe another person.

- hermaphrodite
- isiStabane
- moffie
- tranny
- uSis-Bhuti
- she-male
- he-she

WORDS & PHRASES TO AVOID

Avoid describing peoples names and pronouns as 'chosen' or 'preferred'.
While these terms are often used in good faith, it is wrong. It is better to refer to a transgender person's name as simply their 'name'. Calling a transgender person's name or pronouns 'chosen' or 'preferred' leaves room for others to choose whether or not to respect their name or pronouns.

Avoid saying a transgender person is 'posing' (or 'pretending', 'masquerading', etc) as any gender.
This language suggests that trans people deceive others by hiding the sex they were assigned at birth. This narrative is often used to justify the violent treatment and murder of trans people.

OUTDATED LANGUAGE*

- cross dresser
- FTM (Female to Male)
- MTF (Male to Female)
- transexual
- transvestite
- opposite sex
- sex change
- sex reassignment surgery

*these terms can offend

A QUICK GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICE

- **Make a habit of checking people's pronouns – never assume**
- **Refer to people as they describe themselves (even when referring to their past)**
- **Respect the singular 'they' as a valid pronoun**

CHEAT SHEET

To clearly illustrate the mistakes, their explanations, and possible corrections, we have taken the route of creating three generic characters that we can work with. Ayanda is a **cisgender woman** who uses **she/her pronouns**. Oliver is a **non-binary person** who uses **they/them pronouns**. Ali is a **transgender man** who uses **he/him pronouns**.

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Deadnaming: using a name a person no longer uses	Using the wrong name for someone is disrespectful and makes for misleading reporting	Only use the name a person gives you. Do not mention any 'previous' or 'former' names

Example: You are interviewing Ali, Oliver, and Ayanda for a piece about #FeesMustFall. Noticing that the name on Ali's student card is different from the name he gave you, **in an attempt to be accurate, you write 'Ali, formerly known as [student card name],** feels that campus should have been shut down earlier.' Calling Ali any name other than 'Ali' would be just as inaccurate as calling Ayanda by an anglicised equivalent (like 'Andrea' or 'Ashley'). **Instead you would write 'Ali feels that campus should have been shut down earlier'.**

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Writing 'transman' or 'transwoman'	'Transgender' is an adjective	Use 'transgender man' and 'transgender woman' or 'trans man' and 'trans woman'

Example: Ali tells you about the transphobia he experienced during protests. To introduce this topic, you write 'Ali, a **transman** studying Politics, feels unsafe at protests.' Writing 'transman' as a noun suggests that 'transmen' are not men but rather a different category of person altogether. **Writing about Ali's experiences you explain that 'Ali, a transgender man studying…'**

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Describing people as 'a transgender', 'transgenders', or 'transgendered'	'Transgender' is an adjective	Only use the word 'transgender' as an adjective

Example: In writing about Ali you describe him as 'a **transgendered** man'. In the same way we would never say 'Somizi is gayed' you should avoid referring to someone as 'transgendered'. **Ali should be described as 'a transgender man'.**

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Including intimate details about a person's body, reproductive organs, or medical history	Revealing this kind of information is invasive and voyeuristic	Do not include intimate details about a person's body, reproductive organs, or medical history

Example: While talking to Ayanda, you find out about the genitals Oliver was born with. **You consider including this in your article.** This is sensitive information about Oliver, in order to respect Oliver's privacy **you should avoid sharing this information with your audience.**

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Referring to a person's transition as a 'sex change'	'Sex change' is an outdated way of referring to a person's transition.	If someone wants details of medical procedures to be published, this should be described as they choose

Example: You learn that Oliver is crowdfunding for 'top surgery'. **To describe this you write that 'Oliver is crowdfunding for their sex-change.'** It is better to write about a person as 'transitioning'. Transitioning neither begins, ends, nor depends on medical procedures. **You would instead write 'Oliver is crowdfunding for their top surgery which is a pinnacle event in their process of transition.'**

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COMMON MISTAKES | WHY THIS IS WRONG | CORRECTIONS

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Writing about a transgender person as being either 'pre-op' or 'post-op'	Using terms like 'pre-op' and 'post-op' incorrectly suggests that being transgender is defined by medical intervention	Do not describe transgender people as 'pre-op' or 'post-op'

Example: Ali overhears your conversation with Ayanda about Oliver's genitals and confronts you. Ali asserts that Oliver's genitals do not define them. To avoid more confrontation, **you decide to share this private information by saying 'Oliver is still pre-op'**. Although surgeries can help some people feel at home in their body, this is not a blanket rule. Many trans people do not access medical interventions either because they cannot afford to or simply do not desire them. Ali confronting you makes you realise the unnecessary importance you placed on surgery. **So, you opt not to make a comment that places anyone as 'before' or 'after' any kind of trans-affirming procedure.**

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Referring to a transgender person as 'biologically female' or 'biologically male'	Choosing to describe someone 'biologically' rather than refer to their gender identity is inaccurate	If it is relevant to write about a person's gender identity, use whatever words they give you permission to use

Example: Ali introduces himself to you as 'Ali. Oh, and I use he/him pronouns.' You are confused so you ask whether it is okay if you describe Ali by writing **'Ali is biologically female'**. Choosing to describe someone 'biologically' rather than refer to their gender identity is usually inaccurate and suggests that sex assigned at birth is more real, when in fact it is irrelevant in this instance. When writing about Ayanda, it would likely never occur to you to mention that she is 'biologically female' because you see her assigned sex characteristics as irrelevant to the piece. **Why then detail Ali's?**

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Referring to a transgender person as 'identifying as [insert gender]'	To say a person 'identifies as [insert gender]' is to make it sound as if the person is 'not really' the gender they say they are	Instead, simply write '(x person) is (y gender)'

Example: In writing about Oliver you mention that 'Oliver, who **identifies as non-binary,** finds it difficult to excuse violence in protest spaces.' Instead write **'Oliver, a non-binary student,** finds it difficult ...' or **'Oliver is non-binary,** and they love ...'

COMMON MISTAKES	WHY THIS IS WRONG	CORRECTIONS
Referring to a person as 'becoming' or as having 'been born' or saying 'they used to be [insert gender]' other than they express	Trans people do not 'switch' or 'change' gender. 'Becoming' dangerously implies that they do	Ask people what language to use. If in doubt, always refer to a trans person by their pronouns, even if referring to the past

Example: In writing about Ali's childhood, you explain that **'He was born a girl but is now becoming a man'.** Sometimes trans people know from a very young age who they are, and sometimes it takes people a while to accept, often due to societal pressures. It is usually acceptable to describe someone as being **'raised'** in a particular way. e.g. **'Ali was raised as a girl even though he knew from a young age he was not'.**