

SEAC Guidelines for Scholarship and Professional Gatherings

How to Use this Guide

This guide provides SEA members with anti-racist, anti-colonial, and social justice-oriented principles and resources for our scholarship and professional gatherings. It was created by the SEA's Scholarly Engagement and Access Committee in Summer, 2026.

Included here are suggested best practices, principles, and resources for choosing terminology to describe people and groups and for articulating our positionality in relation to our writing and research. This guide provides scholars with the means to be self-reflective and actively cognizant about their critical frameworks and the words they use when presenting, asking questions, engaging in discussion, and preparing scholarship for publication. It encourages thoughtful and deliberate approaches to and terminology for scholarly analysis of the early Americas, a field comprised of many peoples, places, power structures, histories, languages, literatures, racialized subjectivities, identities, religions, races, ethnicities, heritages, genders, sexual orientations, abilities and disabilities, and more.

To encourage a praxis of self-reflection, a set of principles and examples are provided below. In some cases, a principle will lay out a best practice regarding word choice, such as choosing adjectives (“enslaved”) over nouns (“slave”) to underscore power structures rather than conflating individuals with their socially-determined statuses. In other cases, a principle will guide scholars in terms of questions they might ask themselves, such as their positionality in relation to their research material or to other conference attendees.

To help in thoughtful and deliberate terminology, this guide also compiles an extensive list of style guides and scholarly resources to consult. Resources such as *The Conscious Style Guide* and *The Diversity Style Guide* may prove broadly useful. More specific guides, such as the *Elements of Indigenous Style* and the *Asian American Journalists Style Guide*, may be more useful in regard to specific research subjects. We note specific resources consulted for principles and examples in parentheses throughout the guide.

Scholars might consider using the following steps when drafting, preparing abstracts, writing and presenting conference papers, publishing articles and books, and more:

- 1) Reflect: from whom or from what sources did I learn to use these kinds of words and when? Why am I using these terms and for how long have I been using them?
- 2) Consult: what style guides can I consult to help determine if my usage is appropriate? What scholarly authorities (such as researchers or journals or presses or public intellectuals) use the same or different terminology and why?
- 3) Decide: what terminology is most accurate, transparent about power relationships, respectful of self-definition and naming, historically situated, etc., and how can my abstract, paper, article, book, etc. use that language consistently?

Principles and Examples

- 1) Use terms that describe lived conditions, socially-assigned status, power structures, and practices engaged in (Foreman).

Examples:

- a) Use “enslaved” (adjective) instead of “slave” (noun) to foreground the condition of being enslaved.
 - b) Avoid the use of “slave mistress” or “enslaved mistress” and instead discuss and name the sexual violence, relations, and conditions.
- 2) Be as specific as possible when naming communities of people, with consideration of structures that marginalize those communities by defining them in opposition to whiteness: e.g. “people of color,” “ethnic minorities.”

Examples:

- a) Identify people by their distinct attributes and experiences rather than what they are not.
 - b) Use the specific name an Indigenous nation/tribal nation/community uses for themselves whenever possible. If speaking generally, the term “Indigenous” is generally most appropriate, but be mindful that terms such as “Indigenous” and “Native” define Indigenous people through their relationships to colonizers and thus are most useful when discussing colonization and settler ideologies (Bauer and Ellis; Younging). When using terms such as “Indian” found in settler records, do so mindfully and contextualize such terminology.
 - c) Where possible, avoid descriptors like “cult” or “superstition” or “magic,” when analyzing Indigenous or African-diasporic spiritualist practices. Instead identify specific traditions by name (e.g. Vodou, Obeah) or academic designations like “sacred practices” and “cosmologies.”
- 3) Be mindful that terms and naming conventions are an ongoing project in pursuit of language that is conscious, inclusive, historically nuanced, representative of groups’ self-definition, and so forth. See [The Conscious Style Guide](#) for relevant news sources and critical discussions of evolving terminology.

Examples:

- a) Terms such as “special needs,” “differently abled,” or “handicapable” have been replaced with terms such as “low support needs” and “high support needs” to focus on social structures and conditions informing the lived experiences of people with disabilities, rather than naturalizing a comparison to an ostensible norm of able-bodiedness (see [The BuzzFeed Style Guide](#))
- b) Capitalization of “Indigenous” has now become standard to denote political status and peoplehood (Justice; Rust).

- 4) Center the humanity and personhood of the people you are writing/speaking about.

Examples:

- a) Consider carefully the pronouns and names you ascribe to historical subjects. As Greta LaFleur explains in “What’s in a Name?,” the pronouns or names we use for our subjects can either open or foreclose important questions about the range of gendered experience. LaFleur writes, “using *they/them* pronouns for historical figures ... quietly but insistently marks the possibility of trans lives in past centuries, while insisting on the fact that gender might in all cases be an experience that is beyond the reach of the historian.”
 - b) Make sure to represent oppressed peoples as subjects (not as objects).
- 5) Be mindful of your positionality in relation to the people and material you are writing about, the conference location, and the other conference participants.

Examples:

- a) Familiarize yourself with the Conference Land Acknowledgement. For the 2027 conference, scholars can find the land acknowledgement here: <https://www.societyofearlyamericanists.org/conferences/biennial-conference>
 - b) Consider the imperialist origins of academic intellectual authority and prestige, and be open to multiple ways of knowing and sites of knowledge (Zuroski).
 - c) Be thoughtful in your citation practices; remember that citation is an ethical practice of recognizing intellectual labor (Johnson, O’Brian, and White).
 - d) Encourage broad and conscientious audience participation during Q and A sessions, whether you are an audience member, panelist, or chair. (Consider Eve Tuck’s [thread](#) on facilitating an inclusive Q&A session)
- 6) Consider avoiding Eurocentric / colonial framing when discussing geography, chronology, and historical milestones.

Examples:

- a) Instead of using framing like “the New World” or “the Discovery of America,” opt for phrases like “the early Americas,” “the hemisphere,” or “the onset of European invasion,” unless specifically analyzing the settler mindset of the period.
- b) Be mindful of what principles of periodization inform your scholarship. For instance, consider what temporalities and chronologies compete to define geographical spaces, especially in the context of colonial encounter and settlerism (Bauer, Nemser).

Bibliography

Please note that this list is not meant to be exhaustive; if you have suggestions for additional resources, please reach out to the SEAC.

Critical Background:

- Eugenia Zuroski, "Where do you know from?: An Exercise in Placing Ourselves Together in the Classroom." *MAI Feminism*. 27 January 2020.
<https://www.maifeminism.com/where-do-you-know-from-an-exercise-in-placing-ourselves-together-in-the-classroom/>
- Brooke Bauer and Elizabeth Ellis, "Indigenous, Native American, or American Indian? The Limitations of Broad Terms," *Journal of the Early Republic* 43.1 (Spring 2023), 61-74.
- 1619 Project Forum, *American Historical Review* 127, no. 4, December 2022.
- Rose Stremelau, Malinda Lowery, and Julie L. Reed, "Interconnected Histories of Enslavement and Settler Colonialism," 1619 Project Forum, *American Historical Review* 127, no. 4, December 2022.
- Daniel Heath Justice, Introduction to *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018).
- Great LaFleur, "'What's in a Name?': They/Them," *Journal of the Early Republic* 43, no. 1 (2023), 109-19.
- Marion Rust, "Language Problems," *Early American Literature* 58, no. 3 (2023).
- Ralph Bauer, "Early American Literature and American Literary History at the 'Hemispheric Turn'", *American Literary History*, Volume 22, Issue 2, Summer 2010, Pages 250–265, <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajq008>
- Daniel Nemser, "Infrastructure, Modernity, and Periodization," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 58 no. 1, 2024, p. 43-48. *Project MUSE*,
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2024.a944060>.

Style Guides and Other Resources:

- P. Gabrielle Foreman, et al. "Writing about Slavery/Teaching About Slavery: This Might Help" community-sourced document, 7/9/2026, 12:48pm,
[Writing about "Slavery"? This Might Help](#)
- Eve Tuck, "Facilitating an Inclusive (Indigenist, Feminist) Q&A Session"
<https://thechangeagency.org/facilitating-an-inclusive-indigenous-feminist-qa-session/>
- Shelby Johnson, Katarina O'Briain, Willow White, "[Indigenous Language Guidelines and Resources](#)", *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830* 15.1 (2025).
- Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* (Brush Education, Inc, 2018).
- Karen Yin, *Conscious Style Guide*, 2015-2026, <https://consciousstyleguide.com>
- The Asian American Journalists Association Style Guide: <https://www.aajastyleguide.org/>
- National Association of Black Journalists' Style Guide:
<https://nabjonline.org/news-media-center/styleguide/>
- National Association of Hispanic Journalists, *Cultural Competence Handbook* (August 2020): nahj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NAHJ-Cultural-Competence-Handbook.pdf

- Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice and Innovation, *Race Reporting Guide*, 2015:
https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/Race%20Reporting%20Guide%20by%20Race%20Forward_V1.1.pdf
- BuzzFeed Style Guide: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeednews/buzzfeed-style-guide>
- Rachele Kanigel, ed., *The Diversity Style Guide*: <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/>
- Symmetry Style Guide: Writing About People with Dignity:
<https://symmetry-mag.github.io/style-guide/writing-about-culture-ethnicity-and-race/>
- The Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (A4BLiP) Anti-Racist Description Resources: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf
- National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ) Disability Language Style Guide: <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>
- Transgender Language Primer: <https://translanguageprimer.com/>
- Government of Canada, *Inclusionary: A Collection of Gender-Inclusive Solutions*:
<https://our-languages.canada.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/inclusionary>
- Native Governance Center, *Terminology Style Guide*:
<https://nativegov.org/resources/terminology-style-guide/>
- The Radical Copyeditor (Alex Kapitan): <https://radicalcopyeditor.com>
- Unspinning the Spin - the Women's Media Center's Guide to Fair and Accurate Language:
<https://womensmediacenter.com/unspinning-the-spin/preface-by-robin-morgan-and-glori-a-steinem>
- American Psychological Association *Inclusive Language Guide*:
<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>
- Vox Media, *Language, Please* Style Guidance (2026):
<https://languageplease.org/style-guide/>
- Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity, #WRITEINCLUSION FACTSHEETS:
<https://www.writeinclusion.org/factsheets>
- The Micropedia of Microaggressions: <https://www.themicropedia.org>
- Mother Jones Style Guide:
<https://www.motherjones.com/media/2020/02/mother-jones-style-guide/#race>