

Person-First Language

Person-First Language (n): language that centers the humanity/personhood of people or groups above their condition, disability, or other identifiers.

One small shift that can make a big difference in our classrooms is the way we talk about people. Throughout this course, you'll notice that we try to use **person-first language**, which means putting a person's humanity before any condition, circumstance, or identifier. For example, rather than saying "slave," we use **enslaved person** because slavery was something done to that individual—it was not their identity. These language choices help us teach history in ways that are both historically accurate and respectful of the people whose stories we are telling. While terminology continues to evolve and communities may have different preferences, our goal is to use language thoughtfully and intentionally, always keeping people at the center of the story.

Examples

Instead of...	We use...	What this means...
Slave(s)	Enslaved Person (People/folk)	People who were used as property and labored for the capital profit of enslavers.
Runaway slave(s)	Freedom seeker(s) Self emancipator(s) Maroon folk	People who freed (emancipated) themselves from the bonds of slavery by running away.
Master(s)	Enslaver(s)	People who owned enslaved people and used them as property for their own profit.
Whites	White people	People who are white-presenting or identify as caucasian.
Blacks	Black people	People who are black-presenting or have African ancestry.
Colored	People of color	People who are not

		white-presenting.
Disabled	A person with a disability Someone who has a physically or mentally disability	Someone who has a physical or mental condition that limits their movements, senses, or activities.
Indian (not referring to people from India 😊)	Indigenous Person, Native American, or American Indian The name of the tribe/nation that they are part of, i.e. Algonquian	Someone who is native to an area or place.

Other Identifiers

Identifier Category	Appropriate Terms	Reminders...
Racial Identifiers	African American, African, Latina, Latino, Latinx, Hispanic, White Person, Black Person, Caucasian American, Asian American, European, Japanese American, American Indian, Muslim/Muslim American, Islamic, Jewish, Jamaican American, etc. (This list is not exhaustive!)	• Ask for preference or permission before assuming an identifier. • Friendly reminder: people who are from or live in areas of Africa, are not African Americans. They are African, or Nigerian, or Ethiopian, etc..
LGBTQ+ Identifiers	Gay people/folk, trans people, nonbinary people, queer folk/people	• Ask for preference or permission before assuming an identifier. • Use the pronouns that people ask you to use for them. • If you're unsure of someone's pronouns, it's okay to ask.