



Trans Pride Canada: Style Guide

Media Reference Guide - Best Practices

Trans Pride Canada is a non-partisan network of partners and allies working together for trans rights.

Our mission is to engage in advocacy and education to improve trans rights. We do this by developing and sharing resources with strategic partners & allies nationwide.

Media Reference Guide - Best Practices

The purpose of this document is to assist professional communicators to write clearly, consistently and respectfully about trans issues.

Trans Pride Canada was approached to produce this style guide by members of the press, Members of Parliament, national trade unions, human rights groups and members of the trans community. This guide has been created with their input and draws on respected source documents: GLAAD, NALGJA, AP Stylebook, etc.

Please note that there is some regional variation in usage. There are also emerging terms which have not yet come into general acceptance. These elements are not included in this document. This document is intended to be national in scope and focuses *only* on those elements of style for which there is wide consensus.

Caveat: This guide aims to be comprehensive, but is not authoritative. The preferred terms of the individual or group being discussed must always take precedence.

We have filtered usage as follows:

- ❑ Correct Usage: Terminology that is unambiguous, broadly accepted and neutral in tone. These terms can be used freely.
- ❑ Problematic Usage: Terminology that can create difficulties for writer and reader alike. These terms should be used with caution or avoided.
- ❑ Incorrect or Defamatory Usage: Terminology that is grammatically incorrect, derogatory or offensive. These terms should not be used.



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Core Concepts

This is not intended to be a primer for trans issues. However, an understanding of the key differences between sex and gender is extremely helpful when approaching trans subjects.

As a result, we suggest becoming comfortable with these core concepts first and foremost.

Sex (n)

The biological classification of people as male and/or female. Sex is usually assigned by a physician at birth and is based on a visual assessment of external anatomy.

Gender (n)

The social classification of people as masculine and/or feminine. Whereas sex is an isolated and assigned classification – Gender is something that becomes evident in a social context.

Gender Identity (n)

A person's conscious sense of maleness and/or femaleness. This sense of self is separate and distinct from biological sex.

Cisgender (adj)

Refers to a person whose biological sex assigned at birth matches their gender identity (the antonym for transgender).

Correct. Cisgender men, cisgender women, cisgender person.

Incorrect. He is cisgender, she is cisgendered.

Transgender (adj)

Refers to a person whose biological sex assigned at birth does not match their gender identity (the antonym for cisgender).

Correct. Transgender men, transgender women, transgender rights.

Incorrect. He is transgender, she is transgendered.



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General Terms

Bathroom Bill (n)

Defamatory term used by extremists to trivialize basic human rights legislation for trans people. Do not use.

This transphobic term falsely suggests that legislation will change laws regarding bathroom usage. In actuality, gender identity legislation seeks to address discrimination against trans people in the areas of Healthcare, Education, Housing, Employment, Legal & Social Services.

Correct: Gender Identity Bill.

Cisgender (adj)

Refers to a person whose biological sex assigned at birth matches their gender identity (the antonym for transgender).

Correct: Cisgender men, cisgender women, cisgender person.

Incorrect: He is cisgender, she is cisgendered.

Cross-Dresser, Crossdresser (n)

Someone who generally identifies with their assigned sex but at times identifies with and personifies the “opposite” sex in their gender presentation and dress. Cross-dressing is not necessarily linked to erotic activity nor is it indicative of sexual orientation.

Disorders of Sexual Development (n)

A problematic and controversial diagnosis assigned to intersex people. Because this term labels people as “disordered”, D.S.D. is considered offensive by many and should be avoided.

Drag (n)

Performance art form that plays on gender stereotypes.



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Drag King, Drag Queen (n)

Performers who act out stereotypical gender roles. These are performance roles, not personal identities.

Gender (n)

The social classification of people as masculine and/or feminine. Whereas sex is an isolated and assigned classification – Gender is something that becomes evident in a social context.

Gender Expression (n)

External manifestations of one's gender identity. This is often expressed through "masculine," "feminine" or other gender-specific behaviors.

Both cisgender and transgender people seek to match their gender expression with their gender identity.

Gender Identity (n)

A person's conscious sense of maleness and/or femaleness. This sense of self is separate and distinct from biological sex.

Gender Identity Bill

Widely accepted and neutral term to describe human rights legislation to eliminate discrimination against trans people in the areas of Healthcare, Education, Housing, Employment, Legal & Social Services.

Gender Identity Disorder (n)

A problematic diagnosis assigned to gender variant people. Because it labels people as "disordered", G.I.D. is considered offensive by many and should be avoided.

Gender Queer, genderqueer (adj)

Refers to people who "blur" gender norms. Genderqueer people may identify as either male, female, both, neither or who may reject gender altogether.

Hermaphrodite (n)

A defamatory and obsolete medical term for an intersex person. Do not use.



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Hermaphroditism (n)

A defamatory and obsolete medical diagnosis of intersex people. Do not use.

Intersex (adj)

Refers to a person whose biological/anatomical sex is outside conventional classification of male or female. This may be due to genetic, hormonal or anatomical variations.

The term intersex is not interchangeable with transgender.

Correct: An intersex person, an intersex woman.

Incorrect: They are intersex, she is intersexed.

Pre-operative, Post-operative, Non-operative, Castrated, Sterilized, etc. (adj)

Problematic terms that can invade the privacy of trans people. These terms sensationalize and overemphasize the role that surgeries play in the lives of trans people.

One's surgical status should only be referred to (in the extremely rare cases) when it is absolutely required in the context of the article. Casual discussion of one's genitalia is not appropriate for anyone of any gender.

Sex (n)

The biological classification of people as male and/or female. Sex is usually assigned by a physician at birth and is based on a visual assessment of external anatomy.

Sex Change Operation (n)

A defamatory term referring to sex reassignment surgery. Do not use.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (n)

Refers to surgical alteration of anatomy to affirm one's gender identity. This is only one of many routes of transition. Whether for financial, medical or social reasons, many trans people do not opt for SRS. As a result, writers should avoid overemphasizing or sensationalizing the role of SRS in the transition process.



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Sexual Orientation (n)

Sexual orientation describes a person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person.

Transgender people (just like cisgender people) may identify as straight, gay, etc.

The common convention for describing sexual orientation corresponds with the gender identity of the people involved.

Thus, a couple composed of a transgender woman and a cisgender woman would probably refer to themselves as lesbians. A couple comprising a transgender man and a cisgender woman would likely describe themselves as straight.

As always, use the terms preferred by the individuals, and do so in an unqualified manner.

She-Male (n)

Defamatory term for trans women. Do not use.

Tranny (n)

Defamatory term for a gender variant person. Do not use.

Trans (adj)

Of or relating to gender diverse individuals, groups or interests.

This inclusive category is used by many who also identify as transgender, transsexual, cross-dressers, gender queer, two-spirit, intersex, etc.

Correct. Trans men, trans pride, trans rights.

Incorrect. He is trans, they are trans.

Trans Man (n)

A person whose biological sex assigned at birth was female, but whose gender identity is male.



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Trans Woman (n)

A person whose biological sex assigned at birth was male, but whose gender identity is female.

Transgender (adj)

Refers to a person whose biological sex assigned at birth does not match their gender identity (the antonym for cisgender).

Correct: Transgender men, transgender women, transgender rights

Incorrect: He is transgender, she is transgendered.

Transgenderist (n)

Defamatory term for a gender variant person. Do not use.

Transition (v)

Transitioning refers to a host of activities that trans people may pursue in order to affirm their gender identity.

This may (or may not) include physical changes from medication, surgery, etc.

Transitioning involves substantial personal, legal, financial, social and medical risks and should never be viewed as a precondition to validate a person's gender identity.

It should be noted that transitioning is a process that may take a lifetime to complete.

Therefore, using "before her transition", "after his transition", etc. is problematic.

Transphobia (n)

An irrational fear or hatred of trans people. Often expressed in the form of harassment, violence, targeted misinformation, institutionalized discrimination, etc.

Transsexual (adj)

Problematic description of gender variant people. The term is derived from an archaic medical diagnosis and many trans people feel that this term needlessly pathologizes something that is non-psychiatric in nature.

Furthermore, many people feel that the embedded suffix "sexual" creates confusion:

That this falsely suggests that trans issues are issues of sexuality... and not of gender.



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Transsexual (continued)

As such, some trans people consider the term transsexual offensive and most consider the term problematic.

Having said that, there are some individuals who still choose to self-identify as transsexual. As always, their preference must take precedence.

Transsexualism (n)

Defamatory and obsolete medical diagnosis of gender variant people. Do not use.

Transvestism (n)

Defamatory and obsolete medical diagnosis of cross-dressing. Do not use.

Transvestite (n)

Defamatory and obsolete medical term for someone who cross-dresses. Do not use.

Two Spirit (adj)

An English language umbrella term for a wide range of mixed gender roles found in some First Nations and Aboriginal cultures. This concept may incorporate sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Pronouns, Punctuation and Conjugation

Concrete Nouns – Personal Names

The issue of autonomy (the right to name oneself) is of vital importance to trans people. Autonomy begins with the right to name one's gender and continues with the right to be called by one's chosen name.

A chosen name is NOT an alias – It signifies one's claim to one's identity.

Always use the personal name preferred by the individual, and do so in an unqualified manner.

Correct: Jane is a trans woman from New York.

Incorrect: John (who prefers to be called Jane) is from New York.



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Personal Pronouns – He, Him, She, Her, They, Them

When using personal pronouns, gender agreement is governed by the gender identity or expression of the person referred to - regardless of their anatomical sex.

Always use the pronoun preferred by the individual, and do so in an unqualified manner.

Correct. She is a trans woman and this is her life.

Incorrect. He (she) is a trans woman, “she” is a trans woman.

Possessive Pronouns – His, Hers, Their, Theirs

When using possessive pronouns, gender agreement is governed by the gender identity or expression of the person referred to - regardless of their anatomical sex.

Always use the possessive pronoun preferred by the individual, and do so in an unqualified manner.

Correct. John is a trans man and his hat belongs to him.

Incorrect. John lost “his” hat.

Number Agreement and Neutral Pronouns – They, Them, Their

Although they, them, their, etc. are gender-neutral plurals, some style guides allow these pronouns to reference individuals regardless of number agreement. i.e. the “Singular They”.

This is particularly the case when number or gender is indeterminate.

Proper style has also shifted from the sexist - “Every dog has his day”, to the generic - “Every dog has their day”.

As a result, many style guides (whether they are discussing trans issues or not) are moving towards this neutral usage.



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Pronoun Use - Conjugating Present vs. Past Tense

As a general rule and to help avoid pronoun confusion when referring to the histories of trans people, it is best to use non-gendered language.

Thus, "As a boy growing up in London, Mary faced bullying."

Should be recast: "As a child growing up in London..."

If gendered language is necessary when referring to a trans person's *past*, it is proper to use the pronouns that correspond with their *present* gender identity and expression.

Thus the following, although unusual, are instructive:

Correct: "When she went to an all-boys school", "when he was pregnant".

Punctuation Marks

Beware of misuse of quotation marks, italicization, parentheses or other "qualifying" punctuation.

At best, these trivialize the issues being discussed and undermine the identity of the people involved. At worst, these can be considered defamatory.

Correct: Jane Smith.

Incorrect: John (AKA Jane) Smith, John/Jane Smith, "Jane" Smith, *Jane* Smith.

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