

Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

Recommended Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology

Quick Guide to Appropriate Terminology

Term	When to use
<i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples</i>	The preferred acceptable terminology when referring to all of Australia's collective Indigenous peoples. It is recommended that this should always be capitalised and written in full.
<i>Aboriginal Australians</i> <i>Torres Strait Islanders</i> <i>Indigenous Australians</i>	It is also acceptable to refer to each group separately in the correct context of referring to a distinct group as separate from the other. Remember to capitalise 'Indigenous' when being used as a noun.
<i>Murri</i> <i>Torres Strait Islander peoples</i> <i>Murray Island peoples</i> <i>Mer Island peoples</i>	Geographical identification of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is also acceptable in the correct context and when referring to a group specifically.
<i>First Nations</i>	A term that is generally not used to refer to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is more appropriate to use when referring to International law, as it is the preferred global term used in treaties and covenants. There has been a recent move by some Indigenous Australians to refer to themselves as First Nation Australians but it is generally not the preferred terminology.
<i>Custodians</i>	'Custodians of this land', is a term that is primarily used in the context of Acknowledgement of Country. An Acknowledgement of Country is recognition of the traditional owners of the land and/or waters where the Acknowledgement is made.

Reference Guide to Appropriate Terminology

Awareness of, and sensitivity towards, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Indigenous peoples of Australia, is important. There is an inconsistent understanding as to the appropriate and correct way of expressing reference to Australia's Indigenous peoples. This guide aims to communicate Queensland University of Technology's preferred approach.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have diverse and distinct cultures within the Australian context. Aboriginal peoples are separate and distinct from Torres Strait Islander peoples. Never make assumptions about identity, be guided by the manner in which people identify themselves. This demonstrates respect for all the communities and their individual cultures.

Prior to European arrival, there were hundreds of distinct languages spoken in Australia and now only 20 remain as primary languages, with a limited number being revived. The diversity of languages (including adaptations of English), communication and social priorities and protocols may not be readily understood by people who do not belong to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures. However, the spiritual and religious ties with both land and sea, the strong family networks and support systems remain strong by all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Inclusive language recognises and values the diversity among the many cultural groups belonging to Australia, including those of the original custodians of the land and sea. It is important to recognise the contributions that both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and community groups have made and continue to make to contemporary Australia society.

Acceptable Terminology

The preferred term to use when referring to Australia's collective Indigenous peoples is:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

This should always be capitalised and written in full. It is also acceptable to refer to each separately in the correct context of referring to a distinct group as separate from the other:

- *Aboriginal Australians;*
- *Torres Strait Islanders;* and
- *Indigenous Australians.*

When referring to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively, Indigenous Australians, or Indigenous peoples are acceptable collective terms. Although the preferred collective term is 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', when referring more generally, Indigenous Australians may be used.

The use of 'ATSI' people is not recommended as it is considered offensive and reduces the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and implies one distinct group.

Names Denoting Geographic Identity (relevant to Queensland)

Popular and acceptable usage of names can change over time. If possible, take the time to find out what the Indigenous group themselves prefer to be named. This may depend upon the family structure and land area associated with each particular person. For example, in the correct context, the following may be appropriate:

- *Murri; Goorie;*
- *Torres Strait Islander peoples;*
- *Murray Island peoples;* and
- *Mer Island peoples.*

For most of Queensland the appropriate term is 'Murri'. Torres Strait Islander peoples do not identify with the term Murri because Murri refers to mainland Aboriginal peoples and not Torres Strait Islanders. The term 'Aboriginal person' is quite widely used and an Indigenous person may say 'I am an Aboriginal person', though that person may also identify and say for instance 'I am a Murri' or 'I am a Koori' which is more descriptive and gives more information than purely 'Aboriginal'. The latter phrase refers to an Aboriginal person from NSW; with the former being from Queensland.

Torres Strait Islander peoples have a linguistic and cultural identity which is very different from that of Aboriginal Australians. It is appropriate to refer to these groups as Torres Strait Islanders or use the names of relevant groups/islands.

It is important to be respectful and not be over familiar in addressing or referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Terms Requiring Context

First Nations

'First Nations' is a term that is predominantly used in North America to refer to Canada's Indigenous peoples and historically it is not used in Australia when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 'First Nations' is generally used when referring to International law as it is the preferred global term used in treaties and covenants. 'The first Australians' or 'the first peoples of Australia' are also terms used quite frequently by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves.

Custodians

'Custodians of this land', is a term that is primarily used in the context of Acknowledgement of Country. Please refer to [QUT's Guide to Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners](#).

Unacceptable Terminology

It is recommended to avoid the following terminology as it may offend Indigenous Australians:

- *Aborigines;*
- *Blackfellas;*
- *Coloured;*
- *Native;*
- *Half-Cast / Quarter-Cast (or other phrases delineating proportion of Indigeneity);* and
- *Tribe / Horde / Band / Clan / Moiety.*

The term 'black' has both positive and negative connotations. While it can signify solidarity, unity and political activism against racism to various groups around the world, it has been used also to devalue and victimise people on the basis of their skin colour.

The terms 'Black' and 'Blackfella' should only be used with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander permission. Terms such as 'full-bloods', 'half-castes' and 'part-Aborigines' were used officially in the past for the purpose of discriminatory treatment and are regarded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and others, as inaccurate and is considered to be offensive and insulting.

Some cultural practices have been misrepresented, for example, the English word 'walkabout' has been appropriated inaccurately into English. Similarly, the cultural beliefs of the Aboriginal people and people of the Torres Strait Islands have been misrepresented and devalued, and expressions such as 'superstition' or 'black magic' should not be used when referring to traditional Indigenous beliefs.

Australian South Sea Islanders

Australian South Sea Islanders are not Indigenous Australians but, similarly, have strong family and cultural ties including great respect for their Elders. They share with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples a history of disadvantage and discrimination since European arrival and have been recognised as a distinct cultural group in Australia since 2000.

Many Australian South Sea Islanders have strong connections with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through marital relationships. Some can claim heritage through these cultural connections. However, it is important to remember that Australian South Sea Islander, Aboriginal Australian, and Torres Strait Islander peoples each represent distinct cultural groups.

Accurate Representation of Australian History

Inclusive Australian history acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' culture and tradition have always been rich, diverse and vibrant with complex social and governing structures, laws and customs developed from a religious base that stems from creation.

Talking about 'when Captain Cook discovered Australia' is not only demeaning to the Indigenous people of Australia, but is also incorrect. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were present for at least fifty thousand years prior to the arrival of the Europeans. As a learning institution, QUT recommends avoiding the use of texts or materials which perpetuate historic inaccuracies, or which use euphemisms to describe the historical treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, the phrase 'when Aboriginal people moved to the mission stations', hides the fact that force was used in dislocating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their homeland. Seek guidance from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities where available and always look for, and use, materials which present an accurate history.

Staff of the Oodgeroo Unit or the Library are also available to assist in locating appropriate materials.