

# Terms of reference and protocols

You might currently be feeling overwhelmed by the size of the task ahead of you, that there's so much to learn, and so much conflicting advice, that you're not sure where to start or how to get a handle on it all.

There are many diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities across Australia.



Just as they have their own language, stories, and cultural practices, they may have specific preferences and protocols around terms of reference.

You should always seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in your local area regarding preferences and protocols around terminology use.

However, here are some general guidelines to inform your approach when putting together written documentation and speaking with colleagues.

- In general, it is often best practice to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/person. Note the capitals and the use of the singular people. For example, 'We have many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within our community'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have proudly unique histories and cultures. They are not standalone terms, and it's not appropriate to only refer to Aboriginal people (or vice versa) as a catch all, as if 'it's all the same thing'. The terms are not inclusive or respectful of both groups.
- Pluralisation is not acceptable either, so no AboriginIES or AboriginalS or IslanderS.
- First Peoples / First Nations Peoples / First Australians / Traditional Owners / Traditional Custodians are also generally acceptable terms of reference. Remember the respectful capital letters!
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person may prefer and/or has approved the word 'Indigenous' to be used. Again, check with your local community, and note the capital. In some parts of the country, however, the term 'Indigenous' can be considered offensive due to its history of viewing Aboriginal and Tores Strait Islander people as 'indigenous flora/fauna'.



- It's fine to refer to yourself and others as a non-Indigenous person if you fit the bill.
- Pluralisation should extend to generalised reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'histories,' 'perspectives,' 'ways of being,' 'contributions,' and so forth. There is no one all-encompassing history the way you might refer to 'English History' or 'the history of France'. Each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group has their own unique perspectives and should be respected as such.
- It is important not to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures in the past tense alone. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are connected to the oldest continuing cultures on the planet. In general, stay away from a view of the 'ancient past' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures by reminding yourself that there is certainly a modern, ongoing and thriving expression of these cultures.

See more: <https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/about/terminology-guide>

