

# Going Rogue

## Using (and breaking) style rules to create a culture of conscious editing

Want to implement some of these principles in your newsroom, organization or living-room-turned-freelance-office?

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Start a conversation with your manager about whether incorporating representative language into your coverage would serve your outlet's goals and readers well.
2. Establish a forum through which productive, judgment-free discussion about language choices can happen, whether on Slack, in a weekly meeting, in the office kitchen or elsewhere.
3. Examine your past coverage and try to pick out specific areas for improvement: certain sensitive subjects, serial coverage of an event, social media posts, etc.
4. Solicit suggestions for representative language changes from the wider newsroom, relying on the expertise of others to fill any blind spots you have.
5. Incorporate evaluation of language choices into your editing process. Making it a distinct step in the workflow can help establish it as a habit.
6. If you're a freelancer, incorporate representative language into all your assignments, and be willing to explain the importance of it to publications if they question your choices.

#ACESGoingRogue

#ACES2018

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**LGBTQ communities, queer communities:** Not “community,” as there is not a single monolithic community of gender and sexual minorities

**OFFICIAL STYLE GUIDE menstruation, pregnancy:** Not all women have periods or get pregnant, and some people who aren't women also have periods and get pregnant. This is a simple biological fact that we shouldn't feel the need to explain in our stories. "People who menstruate" or “people who get pregnant” are good alternatives to "women" in these instances.

**Sensitive topics:** For stories that deal with verbal slurs relating to race, ethnicity, gender or any other axis: If the slur occurs within a quote, write out the slur in full to establish an accurate record of the event; if the article discusses the slur itself and its general use in culture, writers may use the slur in full, or they may render it with an asterisk (\*) to soft-censor the word; *Mic* does not allude to slurs with phrases like “the n-word.”

**transgender, trans:** Do not “dead name” trans individuals, or use the name a transgender person no longer uses instead of the name they commonly use and prefer. Never do so if you have not first spoken directly to the person to ask permission; do not ask permission unless it is necessary to your story to include the name.

## BuzzFeed Style Guide

**LGBT:** When referring to the broader community, “queer” (as in “queer people” or “LGBT” as in “LGBT people”) is appropriate. “Gay” is not. “LGBT” is only appropriate when referring to the broader community or groups of people, not when referring to individuals.

**Disability:** We adhere to the AP Stylebook's guidelines, which advise: “In general, do not describe an individual as disabled or handicapped unless it is clearly pertinent to a story...” Use people-first language (i.e., using a person's name or the terms “person” or “people” before a condition) to avoid phrasing that could be seen as defining someone by their disability: e.g., “people with disabilities” rather than “disabled people.”

**Mental health:** Avoid use of “bipolar” and “OCD” in a nonclinical sense. We adhere to the AP Stylebook's guidelines on mental illness, which include not describing a person as mentally ill “unless it is clearly pertinent to the story.” “Mental illness” is OK to use as a general term, but specific conditions should be used when possible. Do not use the term “the mentally ill.”

**Job titles:** Generally, use gender-neutral job titles unless you're referring to a specific person/group of people or gender is relevant to the story (e.g., “salesperson” or “sales rep” rather than “salesman”). Avoid gendered terms like “actress,” “editrix,” and “songstress” outside of direct quotes and titles.