You can’t say that!

HINTS AND TIPS
Artwork: ‘Rhythm of Knowledge’

Josie is from the Gumbaynggirr Nation (the mid-North Coast of NSW).

The artwork tells the story of Josie’s interpretation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students traversing higher education in both undergraduate and postgraduate University degrees. The artwork portrays a symbolic design featuring a Southern Cross Star cluster and a metaphoric ancient body of knowledge travelling across the sky as well as the difficulties and challenges that First Nations people experience within a Western academic institution. However, the artwork is also about triumph and success, as small magical ancestors watch from the universe and cast protection and strength into the students’ academic pathways, providing holistic wellbeing.

Context

The University of Wollongong (UOW) main campus sits in an area of stunning natural beauty that is the ancestral home of the Australian Aboriginal people of Yuin. Yuin is a substantial stretch of the New South Wales (NSW) South Coast and inland regions, spanning from Sydney’s Broken Bay in the north all the way to the Victorian border in the south.

The two major mountains overlooking the Wollongong region, Mount Keira and Mount Kembla, are spiritually significant to local Aboriginal people, representing the protection and constancy of Grandmother and Grandfather, respectively. The three major totems or spiritual guides of this region are the sea eagle of the air, the humpback whale of the ocean and the red-bellied black snake of the land.

The majority of the other domestic campuses of UOW (not including Southern Highlands and Liverpool) also sit on Yuin country.
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Introduction

Yes, this booklet is a terminology guide. It is a glossary of terms that we can all begin to use knowingly to influence change and introduce appropriately consulted language into the space of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discourse. We ask that you take these next coming pages as a safe space; a place to challenge your own understanding; a place to motivate a conversation; a place to gain confidence to experiment.

Aboriginal Australia predates all other recorded histories, cultures and civilizations on Earth. This is a unique position to be in as the nation of Australia moves forward with a new intent to recognise and engage in reconciliation and healing with its First Peoples.

While the effects of invasion, colonisation and settlement on Aboriginal Australia have had such devastating effect, it is clear that there is a shift in the acceptance and appreciation of the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, customs, knowledges and perspectives and their contributions to our modern society. Aboriginal communities also are engaging in discourses of sovereignty, treaty, unity, reconciliation and the processes involved in achieving presence within the Australian narrative. It is simply time: time to share the path and walk together.

This complex and convoluted landscape before us actually represents an opportunity. For you, it presents opportunity for exploration and experimentation, a time to learn new things, a time to try new things, a time to build new understandings. It also presents opportunity to engage in negotiation and consultation, the essential ingredients for building new relationships, establishing new beginnings, new conversations and new underpinnings that can ground aspirations, such as reconciliation and healing.

With governments reprioritising the position of Indigenous Australians, their cultures and their knowledges there is an importance of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within educational institutions to address the changing and evolving landscape. It is pertinent today that there is recognition of these important changes happening to support the decolonising of our structural and institutional constructs and spaces.

This booklet recognises the importance of terminology in decolonising and reconciling the Australian narrative. It respects the significance of the terms and phrases we use when bringing together cultures and peoples sharing Country. Importantly, it is an opportunity for us to challenge the practice that is present currently when speaking, writing and thinking about the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.
Aboriginal

‘Aboriginal’ is used to refer to the original inhabitants of mainland Australia and Tasmania, and their descendants.

You can’t say that!

Aborigine

There is no Aboriginal word that refers to all Aboriginal people in Australia. The term comes from the Latin ab origine, meaning ‘from the beginning’. Australia’s original inhabitants were labelled as ‘Aborigine’ at colonisation. The term features in the legislation, policies and practices of colonisation and assimilation. It is associated with the pain and suffering experienced by generations of Aboriginal peoples. While the word ‘Aborigine’ is grammatically correct it should NEVER be used because of this history.

Respectful use of the word:

– Aboriginal in this context must always start with a capital A.

– Aboriginal must NEVER be abbreviated. Abbreviations have historically been used as racist slurs.

– Aboriginal must be used as an adjective not as a noun. For example, ‘she is an Aboriginal person’, ‘she is Aboriginal’ NOT ‘She is an Aboriginal’.

You can’t say that!

It is disrespectful to replace the word ‘Aboriginal’ with other terms.

The ONLY exception is the use of an Aboriginal nation or cultural identity, e.g., Yuin, Dharawhal.

The same rules apply as for the use of the term Aboriginal.

Pronouns such as ‘the’, ‘they’, ‘them’, ‘their’ and ‘those’ should not be used to replace Aboriginal. The use of pronouns is degrading and promotes social distance between the author and Aboriginal peoples.

The objectification of Aboriginal people by governments and non-Aboriginal Australians has made the historic acts of genocide and assimilation permissible. It is a way of thinking that is responsible for the pain and suffering of many Aboriginal people, families and communities.
Aboriginal people from different parts of Australia use different terms to identify themselves. These terms come from the languages and names used by the Aboriginal peoples of these areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koori</td>
<td>South East Australia - NSW and Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murri</td>
<td>Queensland and North West NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goori</td>
<td>Northern NSW coastal regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunga</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palawa</td>
<td>Tasmania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolgnu</td>
<td>Northern Territory / North East Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anangu</td>
<td>Central Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noongar</td>
<td>South West Western Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The University of Wollongong has campuses in several Aboriginal nations, all of which self-identify as Koori. This is generally accepted as the appropriate term to identify Aboriginal peoples in these areas. Aboriginal people in the local area may personally identify in ways that more appropriately describe where their Country is, e.g., Murri, Goori.

Non-Aboriginal people may use these expressions, however it is disrespectful to use them in a title of a program or a resource. The Aboriginal community should lead and own the decision to use ‘in-group’ words in this way.

**Torres Strait Islander**

Torres Strait Islander people is used to refer to the original inhabitants of the Torres Strait Islands and their descendants. The Torres Strait Islands are at the tip of Queensland between Cape York and Papua New Guinea.

Remember:

– All words of ‘Torres Strait Islander’ must start with a capital letter.
– ‘Torres Strait Islander’ must NEVER be abbreviated or initialised, e.g., TSI.
– ‘Torres Strait Islander’ must be used as an adjective not as a noun.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

The term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person’ is used to refer to the original inhabitants of all states and territories now known as Australia.

The terms ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres Strait Islander’ refer to different cultural groups and are not interchangeable.

Remember:
– All words must start with a capital, i.e., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
– Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander must NEVER be abbreviated or initialised, e.g., ATSI.
– Initialisms and acronyms are only acceptable if it appears this way in the name of an entity or organisation, e.g., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission = ATSIC
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies = AIATSIS.
– ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres Strait Islander’ must be used as an adjective (a describing word) not as a noun (a naming word).
– All words must appear in their set order.

You can’t say that!

ATSI

Use of the acronym ATSI is considered highly offensive.

Indigenous

‘Indigenous’ refers to the original inhabitants and their descendants of a country.

Indigenous is used in a way that is similar to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and features within program and position titles across government, higher education and community services.
– ‘Indigenous’ in this context must always start with a capital ‘I’.
– The World Health Organisation uses ‘indigenous’ with a lowercase ‘i’ when referring to First Peoples in the international context.
There is criticism that ‘Indigenous’ is not specific to the Australian context and that it does not represent the cultural identity and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ is the preferred terminology.

First Australians can also be used as an alternative to Indigenous.

The use of ‘Indigenous’ is considered appropriate if:

– it is a direct quote
– it is in the name of a program, unit or position.

The use of Indigenous may also be accepted in shorter documents, which require the repeated use of the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Tip: Ask if you are not sure or if the document is going to be made public or used within the Aboriginal community.

You can’t say that!

Native

Savage

‘Native’ and ‘savage’ are colonial terms used to describe the original inhabitants of a land. They have links to Social Darwinism, the idea that Darwin’s theory of natural selection could be applied to cultures and societies. Social Darwinists believed in survival of the fittest; that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were less evolved and destined to die out. This view was used to justify the dispossession, genocide, oppression and assimilation of Aboriginal people.

These terms are considered offensive to use in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Some international terms such as ‘First Nations’ and ‘First Peoples’ are becoming more widely used in Australia.

‘First Nations’ is still predominantly used to refer to the original peoples of Canada.

‘First Peoples’ is becoming more common and can be used instead of ‘Indigenous’ as a collective term for the original inhabitants of Australia and their descendants.
Individual and Collective terms

The terms ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Torres Strait Islander’, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ and ‘Indigenous’ must always be used as adjectives not as nouns.

Appropriate nouns to use with these terms include:

Individual: individual, person, woman, man, child, Elder.
Collective (of individuals): people, community
Collective (of cultural groups): peoples, nations.

‘Peoples’ is commonly used to acknowledge the cultural diversity found among Australia’s original inhabitants. It recognises that there are hundreds of different language groups, cultural groups and communities.

You can’t say that!

Aboriginals

Remember: ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Torres Strait Islander’, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ and ‘Indigenous’ are adjectives NOT nouns.

It is disrespectful to use a pronoun in place of ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Torres Strait Islander’, ‘Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander’ and ‘Indigenous’.

Non-Indigenous

‘Non-Indigenous’ refers to people who are not Indigenous to Australia, i.e., are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

‘Non-Aboriginal’ refers to people who are not Aboriginal. This may include Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

Who is Aboriginal?

A three part definition of Aboriginal identity was introduced in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (1983).

An Aboriginal person is defined as someone who:

i) is of Aboriginal descent
ii) identifies as Aboriginal
iii) is accepted as Aboriginal by the community in which they live (or have previously lived).

This definition has been adopted by all federal, state and territory governments to confirm Aboriginality for access to equity-based programs and positions. It also play a role in Land Rights and Native Title claims. Similar requirements are placed on Torres Strait Islander people.
Consider this:

No other group of people in Australia are required to prove their identity.

It is NOT the role of non-Aboriginal people to police Aboriginal identity.

The use of these criteria can create mixed emotions for some Aboriginal people including:

– anger at the similarity to past legislation and policies that required Aboriginal people to carry documentation and wear ‘dog tags’

– resentment that the burden of proof is on them to authenticate their identity to the governments that tried to take it away

– sadness because they may not know where they are from or how to connect and be accepted by the local Aboriginal community.

You can’t say that!

There is NO criteria based on skin colour, lifestyle or ‘the gap’.

It is HIGHLY offensive to use terms or phrases such as:

Mixed blood
Half-caste
Quarter-caste
Full-blood
Part-Aboriginal

What ‘percentage’ Aboriginal?
‘How’ Aboriginal?
‘But you don’t look Aboriginal’.

Terms such as these have been used in the past to classify Aboriginal people and are associated with trauma for many Aboriginal people and communities.

You can’t say that!

Blackfella

This term was once used to label and put down Aboriginal people. It has been reclaimed by the Aboriginal community and is appropriate when used by Aboriginal people. It is highly offensive when used outside the Aboriginal community.
You can’t say that!

Real Aboriginal

Many people have the idea that the ‘real’ Aboriginal people live in Arnhem Land or the Central Desert and that only ‘traditional’ Aboriginal peoples and cultures are ‘really Aboriginal’. This is offensive and denies the identity of Aboriginal people in other contexts and with other histories.

Sometimes the idea of what makes a ‘real Aboriginal’ is based on the many stereotypes associated with Aboriginal peoples and culture. Stereotypes are negative views that ignore cultural and individual differences. These are displayed within the media frequently and are reinforced within society. These stereotypes include:

- Physical characteristics such as skin, hair and eye colour
- Poor language, literacy and numeracy
- Low rates of completion of higher education
- Low socioeconomic status
- Unemployment
- Drug and alcohol issues
- Sexual health issues, including promiscuity and sexually transmitted infections
- Large families
- Teen pregnancies
- Victims of violence and sexual abuse
- Incarcerated or delinquent
- Knowledge of language
- Degree of connection or loss of culture
- Connection to nature
- Remoteness
- In urban areas all Aboriginal people live in low socioeconomic areas and ‘enclaves’
- Don’t own homes
- Have beat up cars
- Are great sportspeople
- Love country music.
It is important to recognise that while some Aboriginal people meet some of these stereotypes, this is not the norm.

Aboriginal people come from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds and have diverse experiences. The successes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needs to be acknowledged. Examples of these successes includes filmmakers, artists, doctors, academics, lawyers, nurses and politicians such as Ivan Sen, Lowitja O’Donoghue, Dr Mark Wenitong, Mick Dodson and Linda Burney. These are often, unfortunately, the untold stories of Indigenous Australia.

Research and statistics may contribute to these misunderstandings about Aboriginal people. Be careful of when applying and referring to population data such as socioeconomic and health statistics. Remember that these are based on population figures and do not take into account the personal context.

Consider this:

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that in 2008 gonorrhoea in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occurred at 81 times the rate as in the general population.

This is a population statistic. Population statistics identify discrepancies and inequities that must be addressed.

It does NOT mean that every young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in 2008 had gonorrhoea.

In fact, in 2008 for every one, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person with gonorrhoea there were almost 65 without it.

When taken out of context population statistics can be disempowering, reinforce the discourse of deficit and contribute to the racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This negative emphasis undermines culture and identity, promotes the internalisation of stereotypes and contributes to the negative outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Tip:

Treat Aboriginal people as individuals with individual needs and understandings.

**Stolen Generations**

The term ‘Stolen Generations’ is used to describe the forcible removal of children from their families and communities under acts of parliament. Fairer-skinned Aboriginal children were considered easier to assimilate into white Australia and were targeted by governments, churches and welfare bodies in an effort to eradicate Aboriginal people and culture.

As many as one in three Aboriginal children were stolen from their families and communities. This practice occurred primarily between the late 1800s and the 1970s, although some institutions continued this practice into the 1980s.
For example, Bomaderry Children’s Home (United Aborigines Mission) operated between 1908 and 1988. It is known as the birthplace of the Stolen Generations in NSW. Children between birth and age 10 were housed there before being relocated to Cootamundra Girls’ Home or Kinchela Boys’ Home. Children in these institutions experienced extreme physical, mental, cultural and spiritual abuse. The effects of these policies are still felt today by these children, their families and their communities.

**Country**

‘Country’ refers to a culturally defined area of land that is associated with a culturally distinct group of people.

Country is about more than just geography. Country is about the intimate relationships Aboriginal people have with the environment in its entirety, including the landscape, the seasons, the flora and the fauna. Country is also about ancestral, cultural, spiritual and social connections to that land. Country is a place of learning. Connection to Country strengthens Aboriginal identity.

Being ‘on Country’ means that you are on your traditional lands.

– Country in this context must always start with a capital C.

**Traditional Owner**

A Traditional Owner is a person who is directly descended from the original inhabitants of Country and has a cultural association with that Country. ‘Traditional Custodian’ is an alternative name and recognises the unique relationship of Aboriginal peoples with Country.

Traditional Owners are highly respected. Both words MUST be capitalised.

**Nation**

‘Nation’ refers to a culturally distinct group of people associated with a particular, culturally distinct country and language.

‘Nation’ is generally considered to be the most respectful term. Language groups can also be used.

The University of Wollongong campuses are situated across several Aboriginal Nations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wollongong / Innovation Campus</th>
<th>Dharawal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shoalhaven Campus</td>
<td>Yuin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batemans Bay</td>
<td>Yuin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bega</td>
<td>Yuin, Monaro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Highlands</td>
<td>Dharawal / Tharawal, Gundungurra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loftus</td>
<td>Dharawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>Dharug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Eora</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Clan**

‘Clan’ is generally accepted as a subset of Nation and refers to a local descent group, larger than a family, and based on common ancestry.

**You can’t say that!**

**Tribe**

**Moiety**

‘Tribe’ is not appropriate. It is borrowed from European experiences in North America and Africa. It doesn’t communicate the diversity between Aboriginal peoples.

Words like ‘moiety’ have been used by anthropologists to try and describe cultural groupings.

Some Aboriginal people may choose to use these terms but non-Aboriginal people should avoid using them.

**Mob**

‘Mob’ refers to a group of people associated with a particular place or Country.

It is an important term used between Aboriginal people to identify who they are and to acknowledge the family and social connections to each other. Knowing who your mob is/are tells you where and how you belong.

The policies and processes of colonisation set out to break down these connections. As a result many Aboriginal people don’t know who their mob are or how they belong.

While it is widely acceptable, some Aboriginal people do not like to use the term ‘mob’ due to its link to a time when Aboriginal people were considered to be part of the Australian fauna.

This is an in-group term. It is not appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use this term unless they have community acceptance for its use, particularly if used to name or promote a service or a program.

**Community**

Aboriginal communities are based on culture, family ties and shared experiences.

Community can also be used in the geographic sense. However, it is important to remember that these communities are culturally diverse. Geographic-based communities in the Illawarra and South Coast consist of Aboriginal people from the Dharawal and Yuin nations as well as Gamilaroi, Wiradjuri, Dunghutti and Bundjalung. Geographic communities also consist of Aboriginal people who do not know what their cultural identity is as a direct result of the policy of assimilation.

Community is about connection and belonging and is central to Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal people may belong to more than one community.
**Kinship**

‘Kinship’ is a system of family and social organisation that defines where a person fits within an extended family and community. It describes an Aboriginal person’s family connections and social relations and dictates their rights, responsibilities and behavioural expectations.

Aboriginal values, beliefs, identity and language are developed and nurtured within the family. Keeping the family strong and healthy, both physically and spiritually, is vitally important to the continuance of Aboriginal society. Children learn early that to refer to their ‘family’ is to refer to the extended family. An Aboriginal family might include mother, father, several children, numerous aunts, uncles and cousins, a number of grandparents and several grandchildren. These family members are both real and classificatory.

**Culture**

‘Culture’ refers to the accepted customs, understandings and social behaviours shared by members of a group or community. Culture consists of Country, language, the Dreaming, artistic expression, ways of living and working, relationships and identity.

Aboriginal Australia is multicultural. It is respectful to refer to cultures in the plural as it reflects the diversity of Aboriginal peoples.

**You can’t say that!**

*It is offensive to use terms that classify culture.*

- Primitive
- Native
- Simple
- Prehistoric
- Stone Age

*These terms imply that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and societies are inferior and not as advanced as Western European cultures.*

**Dreaming**

The Dreaming is the Western European name for Aboriginal spirituality. In the Dreaming, ancestral beings created the natural world. These creation stories are the basis of Aboriginal culture and lore. The Dreaming is linked to Country and is a source of identity for Aboriginal people.

The Dreaming has existed from the beginning of time and is ongoing or infinite. Aboriginal people continue to engage with the Dreaming and spiritual beings today.

- Dreaming should be capitalised as a sign of respect.
The Dreamtime is a specific period of creation that has finished.

**You can’t say that!**

**Myths**

**Folklore**

**Legends**

These terms imply that the Dreaming is not true or that it occurred in the past. The Dreaming is ongoing.

**Elder**

An Elder is someone who is recognised within their community for their cultural knowledge, wisdom and contribution to the community. They are highly respected and are responsible for making decisions within and speaking on behalf of the community.

Age alone does not make someone an Elder.

Elder MUST ALWAYS start with a capital E as a sign of respect.

Elders are often referred to as ‘Uncle’ or ‘Aunty’ as a sign of respect even if they are not related. You should avoid using these titles unless you are familiar with the Elder, have been invited by the Elder to call them this or are advised to do so by a member of the Aboriginal community.

**You can’t say that!**

**Chief**

Chief is a term that comes from other cultural groups and is not applicable to Aboriginal peoples.

**Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country**

A ‘Welcome to Country’ follows thousands of years of protocols around welcoming people to Country and offering safe passage and protection to visitors. A Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country is now a regular feature of meetings, community events and conferences. This is an important practice as it recognises Aboriginal peoples as Traditional Custodians and shows respect for the enduring relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Country.

There are significant differences between a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of
**Country.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welcome to Country</th>
<th>Acknowledgement of Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A formal welcome onto an Aboriginal Country.</td>
<td>A statement of recognition of the Traditional Owners of that land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performed by a Traditional Owner or Custodian of the Country on which you are</td>
<td>Performed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as a way for all people to show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting.</td>
<td>awareness and respect for Aboriginal peoples, their culture and heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performed by an Elder or leader in the community. Do not bring someone in from</td>
<td>An Acknowledgement of Country can be used exclusively if an Elder or other appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside the community unless local Elders have approved this.</td>
<td>member of the Aboriginal community is not available to perform a Welcome to Country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Traditional Custodians will feel it is more culturally appropriate for them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to do an Acknowledgement rather than a Welcome.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be included in public events and/or those that involve dignitaries.</td>
<td>May be used independently for smaller or internal events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should always be the first item on the agenda.</td>
<td>Should be the first item on the agenda. The only exception is if it follows a Welcome to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can take different forms including a speech in language or in English with or</td>
<td>Country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without an accompanying performance, such as a smoking ceremony, playing of the</td>
<td>Examples of both long and brief Acknowledgements of Country are provided in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In providing cultural services such as a Welcome to Country, artistic performances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or ceremonies, Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. Appropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remuneration should be discussed and arranged prior to the event.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You can’t say that!

A Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country are NOT the same. It is disrespectful to have an inappropriate person is doing a Welcome to Country. It is particularly offensive to have a non-Aboriginal person say a Welcome to Country.

If in doubt, ask Woolyungah Indigenous Centre (UOW), the relevant Local Aboriginal Land Council or other Aboriginal Community Organisations for advice.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags

The Aboriginal flag was designed in 1971. The flag and its colours hold great symbolic meaning for Aboriginal people and their identity.

- Black: represents the Aboriginal peoples of Australia
- Red: represents the red earth and spiritual connection to Country
- Yellow: represents the sun, provider of life and protector.

The Torres Strait Islander flag was first flown in 1992.

The Dari (headdress) symbolises the Torres Strait Islander peoples. The five pointed star beneath it represents the five major island groups and reflects the navigational importance of stars to these seafaring people.

- Green: represents the land
- Black: represents the Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Blue: represents the sea.

Both flags were introduced as official flags of Australia in 1995. The official order of display, from the audience’s left to right, is the Australian flag, the NSW flag, the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag.
Social and Emotional Well Being (SEWB)

Aboriginal peoples have a holistic view of health and wellbeing. The health of an Aboriginal person’s connections to Country, community, culture, kinship, spirituality, as well as their physical and mental health, contribute to their wellbeing.

Sorry Business

‘Sorry business’ refers to the cultural practices and protocols associated with the death of a family or community member. The collective nature and interconnectedness of Aboriginal families and communities means that the loss of an individual is felt deeply by the group. Sorry business is an important part of the mourning and healing process.

Sorry business can also refer to the forcible removal of children from their families, known as the Stolen Generations.

Men’s and Women’s Business

‘Men’s and Women’s Business’ is commonly understood as the practice of men and women discussing gender-specific issues separately. This is only one aspect of Men’s and Women’s Business.

In Aboriginal cultures there are certain knowledge, practices, customs and places that are gender specific. Men’s and Women’s Business refers to these gender-based practices collectively.

If you aren’t sure whether or not a topic / conversation / issue is Men’s or Women’s Business then ask. Woolyungah Indigenous Centre, the Local Aboriginal Land Council or the local Aboriginal Medical Service can help you identify any sensitivities and the appropriate way in which they can be addressed.

You can’t say that!

It is offensive to use terms such as Men’s and Women’s Business in a trivial manner. It may not be appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use these terms.

‘Walkabout’ and ‘Koori time’ are other terms based on cultural practices that are often trivialised or used to mock people. Non-Aboriginal Australia has made a habit of misappropriating and trivialising culturally significant practices.

Shame

‘Shame’ refers to the discomfort and sense of humiliation that Aboriginal people often feel when they are singled out, feel awkward and/or self-conscious. The experience of shame is not limited to negative causes such as being ridiculed, criticised or behaving in a foolish way. Aboriginal people can also feel shame if they are publicly praised or appear to be better than other people, particularly other Aboriginal people.
Deadly

‘Deadly’ is a word used in the same way as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good.’ For example: The ‘Deadlys’ or National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Music, Sport, Entertainment and Community Awards were held between 1995 and 2014. Locally, the Northern Illawarra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) holds the annual Deadly Encouragement Awards to recognise and reward Aboriginal children and youth who have demonstrated commitment, improvement and achievement in Northern Illawarra schools.

Non-Aboriginal people can use the word as an expression, however, it is disrespectful to use it in a title of a program or a resource. The Aboriginal community should lead and own the decision to use in group words in this way.

How to use this knowledge?

Strengths focus

The focus on Aboriginal people and communities often takes a negative viewpoint.

‘The gap’ for example adopts a deficit framework, placing focus on the discrepancies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Many Aboriginal people experience disadvantage that needs to be addressed. It is important keep sight of the strengths that are characteristic of Aboriginal cultures and communities. The language used needs to reflect these collective strengths and capabilities.

Telling the right stories

Aboriginal history has been misrepresented for more than 230 years. Much of the popular language used denies Aboriginal peoples their histories and their experiences of colonisation.

You can’t say that!

Settlement

Use of the term ‘settlement’ is offensive and denies the history and impact of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples. Settlement implies that people established a community in a place that was previously uninhabited. The land now known as Australia was invaded, occupied and colonised.

It is more appropriate to use the terms:

Invasion
Colonisation
Occupation
You can’t say that!

Pre-history

It is offensive to use this term as it suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders did not have a history before European invasion.

It is more appropriate to use the terms:

Indigenous (Australian) history

Pre-invasion history

Invasion history

Post-invasion history

Avoid limiting Aboriginal history and occupation of the Australian continent.

The earliest date of Aboriginal occupation is constantly changing as dating techniques are improved. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander view of creation is that people have been on Australia since the land was created by Ancestral beings. It is more appropriate to use terms such as ‘since the beginning of the Dreaming’.

You can’t say that!

Discovered

First

It is offensive to say that Australia or any part thereof was ‘discovered’ or that any non-Aboriginal person was ‘the first to’ accomplish any feats of discovery. Use of these terms reinforces the myth of Terra Nullius and denies the existence of Aboriginal peoples pre-invasion.

It is more appropriate to specify European descent, e.g.:

“Captain Cook was the first Englishman to map the east coast of ‘New Holland’” or

“Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth were the first European men to cross the Blue Mountains”.
Aboriginal Worldviews

A worldview is a set of beliefs and cultural values held by a group of people. A person’s worldview influences the way that they think, behave, interact with and interpret the world and others in it.

Understanding basic elements of Aboriginal worldviews will form the basis of engaging and communicating effectively with Aboriginal people and communities.

There are a number of cultural values common among Aboriginal peoples including:

– People and relationship orientation. Relationships are more highly valued than objects and material possessions.
– Family is everything. Family for Aboriginal people extends beyond the nuclear family of parents and children to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and the mob.
– Relatedness. Everyone and everything is interrelated.
– Collectivism. Group wellbeing has priority over individual wellbeing. Individuals share responsibility for each other and the group. Sharing is both a responsibility and a privilege.
– Reciprocity. The practice of exchanging things for mutual benefit.
– Land is sacred. All things are connected to the land: culture, spirituality, family, identity. Country gives Aboriginal people a sense of belonging.
– Acceptance. Each individual is accepted for their contribution, their strengths and their weaknesses.
– Equality. Every person has a right to be equal.
– Respect. Respect for position and responsibilities within kinship groups and communities.

Communication

Engaging with Aboriginal people and communities requires that you operate in ways that are congruent with these cultural values. In particular, effective communication with Aboriginal people and communities relies on relationships, respect and responsibility. These form the foundation of Aboriginal worldviews and cultural values.

Relationships
Respect
Responsibility

These three aspects are interrelated and contribute to effective communication with Aboriginal people and communities.
Develop Relationships

Relationships are highly valued by Aboriginal people and communities. They often develop slowly and depend heavily on trust.

– Take the time to form relationships with individuals, their families and communities.
– Be open and honest. Many Aboriginal people and communities are sceptical and cynical due to their experiences with governments, services and non-Aboriginal people. Do not take this personally, just talk straight.
– Know what you’re promising. All engagement and communication has an implied promise. Be aware of what this is. Do not make promises that you cannot or will not deliver. This is a common experience for Aboriginal people and communities and creates barriers to future engagement.
– Show respect for the people you communicate with, the community and their responsibilities.

Consulting: It is the responsibility of non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people from outside the local community to make sure that they are consulting with the right people. If you are not sure then ask a recognised Aboriginal group or service such as Woolyungah Indigenous Centre or the relevant Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Show Respect

Respectful communication depends on the context. It includes showing respect for the person or people you are engaging with, respect for the community, respect for culture, respect for Country and respect for the message or issue.

– Use the correct terminology.
– Do not shop around for support. This is disrespectful and can be divisive within Aboriginal community. There is a difference between consulting broadly and going to a particular Elder or group that you know will support you.
– Allow time for effective consultation and communication. Remember that information is processed and decisions are usually made in a group. Allow time for this to occur.
– Be yourself. Do not talk yourself up, brag or drop names to make yourself look better. Aboriginal people and communities will see through this. It may also have the opposite effect by putting people down and shaming them.
– Do not try to appease Aboriginal people or community with empty gestures or measures.
– Treat others as your equal and value their contribution.
– Know who you are engaging with, particularly if introducing them formally.
Hierarchy of naming

1. Language group or Nation
2. Area a person comes from or self-identifying term
3. Aboriginal
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Responsibility

Responsibility for each other underpins Aboriginal families and community. Consider your own contribution and impact on Aboriginal people, families and communities.

– Be open about your priorities, what you need to achieve and what you can offer. Aboriginal people and communities function on the principle of reciprocity or exchange for mutual benefit and are generally willing to support others achieving their goals.

– Make sure that there is real benefit for Aboriginal people and communities.

– Do not promise anything that you cannot or will not deliver.

– Admit fault or take responsibility where it applies.

– Take responsibility for making sure that engagement and consultation is appropriate.

Communication techniques

Aboriginal cultures are high context. This means that Aboriginal people communicate in ways that are implied rather than explicit stated and rely on context. The majority of non-Aboriginal Australians come from low context cultures and rely on explicit communication where information is clearly defined.

Understanding this difference is key to communicating effectively with Aboriginal people and communities.

Reflect on your own communication style. Would you consider your communication to be high context or low context?

Consider the following when communicating with Aboriginal people:

– Nonverbal communication is significant. What is not said is just as important as what is said.

– Voice tone, facial expressions, eye movement and gestures are important elements of communication. Disagreement or conflict is often expressed through these nonverbal cues.

– Direct eye contact may be considered rude or disrespectful. It does not necessarily indicate an Aboriginal person is being evasive. This is generally not a local issue. It may, however, be an issue in some other areas and communities or with Aboriginal people who have come from other locations.
– Verbal messages are indirect. This also applies to the way questions are asked and answered. Many Aboriginal people are more likely to respond to indirect questions.

– Silence is commonplace and should not be confused for a lack of understanding or hearing. It creates the space for Aboriginal people to listen to the views of others and think about what is being said before responding. Silence can also mean that an Aboriginal person is noncommittal.

– The level of trust and commitment to a relationship determines the amount of information shared.

– An affirmative response does not necessarily mean ‘Yes’. This is particularly likely if an Aboriginal person is put on the spot, confronted or asked questions. Aboriginal people have been conditioned to respond with ‘Yes’, particularly to authority figures and systems. This will occur even if a person disagrees or if agreeing is not in their best interests. Be aware of this and try to avoid creating these situations.

Communication is most effective when face to face. This provides an opportunity to establish trust, build relationships and read the nonverbal cues that are characteristic of communication with Aboriginal people.
Message from Jade Kennedy, Jindaola Program facilitator and Lecturer in Indigenous Knowledges.

“It is with great respect, responsibility and reciprocity that we share with you the knowledges and understandings within this booklet. As you move forward and back through its pages we remind you that this is an emergent space ... there is contestation, at times confusion and sometimes even conflict when new terms are introduced, used and articulated in different spaces and places. Do not be discouraged, be encouraged ... at the risk of sounding cliché ... be the change ... be the individual that starts a conversation towards reconciliation and healing ...

Consultation and negotiation around the content of this booklet has occurred with Aboriginal staff and students of the University of Wollongong and selected Aboriginal Elders and Knowledge Holders along the NSW South East coast. Any particular questions or concerns regarding this process can be directed to jkennedy@uow.edu.au

I want to thank Uncle Richard Archibald, Aunty Dorothy Moore, Uncle Jack Hampton and Aunty May Button for their wisdom, guidance and knowledges in this space.”

This booklet is intended to guide University of Wollongong staff, students and community around the appropriate, respectful and sensitive words that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the entire continent. There will at times be words that have particular relevance to the Aboriginal Countries the University’s on-shore campuses are connected to and, as such, the Booklet should not be seen as operating in isolation; instead it should be used as a starting point; a conversation starter; and an opportunity to question ‘can I say that?’

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