

LANGUAGE MATTERS

Understanding First Nations, Inuit and Métis Terminology

There are many terms associated with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. It is important to be respectful of this diversity and refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals and communities with the terms that most closely describe how they wish to be identified.

It is critical to learn and recognize that certain terms have been used to denigrate, oppress and erase First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and their cultures and that utilizing culturally responsive language supports collective efforts toward resurgence, decolonization and reconciliation.

This guide covers terminology in use at the University of Guelph.

Do
Capitalize the terms
Aboriginal, Indigenous,
First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

First Nations People

First Nations people include Status, Treaty or Registered Indians, as well as non-Status and non-Registered Indians. Many people prefer to be called First Nations instead of Indian, which is the term in the Indian Act that their communities never adopted or accepted.

Although First Nations has replaced Indian in common language there are some legal reasons for its continued use due to its inclusion in the Constitution Act of 1982 and the Indian Act.

The term First Nation is also used to refer to federally recognized communities instead of the term reserve. Reservation is a term used in the United States.

Don't
Use Indigenous peoples to
refer to First Nations, Inuit or
Métis peoples separately.

Inuit

The Inuit are a group of culturally similar Indigenous people inhabiting the Arctic land and waters from the Mackenzie Delta in the west, to the Labrador coast in the east and from the Hudson's Bay Coast, to the islands of the High Arctic.

Inuit lands are referred to as Inuit Nunangat which includes the Inuvialuit Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec), Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador), and the ice, land, and water within these regions.

Do
Use the singular Inuk when
referring to a single person.

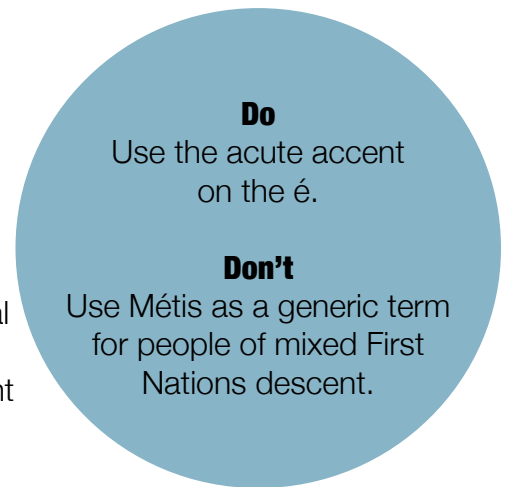
Don't
Use "Inuit people" which is
redundant.
Use the term Eskimo.

Métis People

The Métis are a distinct people with a unique history, culture, language and territory that includes the waterways of Ontario, surrounds the Great Lakes and spans what was known as the historic Northwest.

The Métis Nation is comprised of descendants of people born of relations between First Nations women and European men. The initial offspring of these unions were of mixed ancestry. The genesis of a new Indigenous people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage of these mixed ancestry individuals.

Distinct Métis settlements emerged as an outgrowth of the fur trade, along freighting waterways and watersheds. In Ontario, these settlements were part of larger regional communities, interconnected by the highly mobile lifestyle of the Métis, the fur trade network, seasonal rounds, extensive kinship connections and a shared collective history and identity.



Indigenous or Aboriginal?

The University of Guelph uses Indigenous peoples as the collective phrase to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Indigenous Peoples

Globally, Indigenous is used in reference to a specific land and the people who have occupied those lands since time immemorial.

Indigenous is considered by some to be a more inclusive term since it identifies people in similar circumstances without respect to national boundaries or local conventions.

When using Indigenous peoples in the Canadian context, clarify that it is in reference to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

It should be noted that while the term Indigenous has increased in use in Canada, it is also contested by some because it does not acknowledge the unique identities or distinct rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Aboriginal Peoples

Used in Canada because of its inclusion in the Constitution Act of 1982, Section 35 affirming the Aboriginal and treaty rights of “Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.” The Canadian context for the term is not discernible in other countries such as the United States, New Zealand or Australia.

