Through language we *transform reality.* We dictate what is real. This creates an enormous responsibility to use language to describe and create the best, most radical reality we can imagine—a world free from violence in all its forms; a world where all life, all identities and experiences, and all ways of making meaning are understood as valuable and sacred.

> Language can hurt or heal; it can cause harm or create liberation—the choice is ours.
>
> —*The Radical Copyeditor*

How We Write About People

PleasePrEPMe's language reflects our values as an organization by respecting and honoring the bodies, experiences, and choices of all the people we serve. The following guidelines are just that—not unbreakable rules but evolving guidelines for writing with care, empathy, and curiosity.

Person-first language
As a general rule, use person-first language to acknowledge that people and communities are more than their HIV, their substance use, etc.

- Use: People living with HIV
- Avoid: HIV-positive people, HIV-infected people, HIV patients

- Use: Person who uses drugs, people who inject drugs
- Avoid: Drug users, injection drug users

That said, people-first language is not always be the best choice. For example, replacing the phrase "sex workers" with "people who exchange sex for money" puts the people first, but it may not reflect their experience and the language they use to describe themselves.

Pay attention to the ways people and communities refer to themselves—and how they prefer to be described by people outside their community—and stay curious about how that language changes over time.

Inclusive, gender-neutral language
"Sex" and "gender" are not the same thing, and there is power in using language that distinguishes between them:

- **Sex** is the classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy.

- **Gender identity** is a person's internal, deeply held sense of their own gender.

- **Gender expression** is a person's external manifestations of gender, expressed through their name, pronouns, clothing, behavior, voice, hairstyle, and/or body characteristics.

- **Gender** is the complex interrelationship between gender identity, gender expression, and the body—how we experience our own body and how others interact with us based on our body.

To keep language inclusive and gender neutral, use singular "they" as a pronoun wherever possible:

- Use: If your partner has an undetectable viral load, they have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV through sex.
- Avoid: If your partner has an undetectable viral load, he has effectively no risk of transmitting HIV through sex.

As appropriate, aim for gender-neutral language when discussing fertility, conception, or birth control:

- Use: Ovulation is the most fertile time for bodies that produce eggs.
- Avoid: Ovulation is the most fertile time for women.

Respectful language about transgender people
"Transgender" means having a gender identity that does not align (according to societal expectations) with the sex designated at birth. "Cisgender" means having a gender identity that does align with birth-assigned sex.

"Transgender" is an adjective, not a noun:

- Use: transgender people
- Avoid: transgenders
- Never: transgendered

Unless writing about trans women or trans men specifically, use language that is inclusive of nonbinary-identified transgender people:

- people of transgender experience
- transgender people
- people of all genders

Avoid referring to "people who identify as transgender" as a blanket description for trans people. A transgender person may identify as trans, or may identify as a woman, a man, or another gender.

"Transgender" is not a sexual orientation. People of transgender experience may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, etc.

Use language that respects a person's gender identity rather than emphasizes the sex they were assigned at birth:

- Use: designated female at birth; assigned male at birth
- Avoid: born a woman; born a man; biologically female; biologically male; genetically female; genetically male

Always use a person's correct pronouns (and avoid calling pronouns "preferred"). "They" as a singular pronoun is gaining popularity (and is accepted in Merriam-Webster and American Heritage Dictionary!) but there are plenty of others:

- Sean presented their data.
- Avery is her organization's most senior staff member.
- Nadine shared gher slides with the group.
- I followed up with Rae about hir questions.

When using singular "they," follow the same rules as for singular "you":

- they did, they are, themself/you did, you are, yourself

See "The Radical Copyeditor's Style Guide for Writing about Transgender People" for more discussion of evolving language related to transgender people.

Here are some additional examples of inclusive and respectful language about people:

Use:	Avoid:
client, visitor	patient
condomless sex; sex without condoms, PrEP, or TasP	unprotected sex
gay (adjective) or lesbian (adjective or noun)	homosexual (may be experienced as an outdated clinical term)
Latino, Latina, Latinx	Hispanic
people affected by HIV, populations affected by HIV	high-risk people, high-risk populations
person living with HIV	HIV-positive person, HIV-infected person
person who injects drugs	injection drug users
prioritize, tailor to	target
sexual orientation	sexual preference

sex worker	prostitute

Preferred Style for Common Terms and Phrases

Using consistent language across PleasePrEPMe.org content reinforces our messaging about PrEP and helps readers understand the services and resources we provide. Here are some common terms and phrases used in discussing HIV, HIV prevention, and health care.

ABC
- AIDS, not AIDS virus (AIDS is a diagnosis and cannot be transmitted)
- client, not patient
- compared with (used to illustrate similarities or differences), vs. compared to (used more rarely, to strongly assert that two things are similar)
- condomless sex, not unprotected sex

DEF
- external ("male") condoms

GHI
- health care, not healthcare
- HIV, not HIV virus
- internal ("female") condoms
- internet, not Internet

JKL
- living with HIV, not HIV positive or HIV infected

MNO
- Medi-Cal

PQR
- post-exposure prophylaxis
- pre-exposure prophylaxis
- PrEP, not PREP
- PrEP DAP

STU
- sex partners, not sexual partners
- sexually transmitted infection (STI), not sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- transgender, not transgendered

VWXYZ
- website, not web site, Web site, or Website

Mechanics

Again, these guidelines promote consistency and readability across PleasePrEPMe.org. (#nerdsmithing)

Abbreviations and acronyms

Use "PrEP" in page headings (e.g., "Find a PrEP Provider"). In body text, define PrEP on first mention:

- PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a proven HIV-prevention strategy.

In most other cases, use the full name or term on first mention, then use the shortened version for all subsequent references. If the name or term is not widely known, follow the first mention with the shortened version in parentheses.

- First use: Pacific AIDS Education and Training Center (PAETC)
- Second use: PAETC

BUT: In hyperlinked text (e.g., in lists of state resources), acronyms for national entities are fine:

- CDC - Talk to Your Doctor About PrEP

Capitalization

In general, avoid capitalizing letters except in headings and acronyms.

- Use: PrEP stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis.
- Avoid: PrEP stands for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis.

- Use: hepatitis C
- Avoid: Hepatitis C, Hep C

Title case capitalizes the first letter of every word except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. Use title case for page headings:

- PrEP Resources in All 50 States
- How to Search for a PrEP Provider

When writing out an email address or URL, use all lowercase (and don't italicize):

- contact@pleaseprepme.org

- www.pleaseprepme.org

BUT: Capitalize names of websites or web campaigns:

- PleasePrEPMe.org launched June 11, 2015.
- PrEPFacts.org

Punctuation

Commas
When writing a list, use the serial comma. The serial comma increases readability by dividing your list into meaningful chunks:

- Yum: Have a sandwich! I made grilled cheese, turkey, and peanut butter and jelly.
- Yuck: Have a sandwich! I made grilled cheese, turkey and peanut butter and jelly.

Semicolons
Semicolons typically take the place of commas in sentences that include complicated lists—again, to help group the listed things into meaningful chunks:

- Use a semicolon: Consider PrEP if your partner is living with HIV and has an unstable viral load; exchanges sex for money, housing, or other needs; or injects drugs.
- Don't use a semicolon: Consider PrEP if your partner is living with HIV and has an unstable viral load, engages in survival sex, or injects drugs.

Dashes and hyphens
Use a hyphen (-) without spaces on either side to link two words into one phrase to modify the next word:

- Use a hyphen: a once-daily pill
- Don't use a hyphen: a pill taken once daily

- Use a hyphen: PrEP is an HIV-prevention tool.
- Don't use a hyphen: PrEP is a tool for HIV prevention.

- Use a hyphen: a well-tolerated regimen
- Don't use a hyphen: PrEP is generally well tolerated.

Use an en dash (–) to link two-word names or phrases with the next word to modify the word after that:

- a transgender woman–led organization
- the San Francisco–based agency

Also use an en dash to indicate a range or span of numbers:

- 2017–2018
- 50–60 chats

(To insert an en dash, press option + hyphen on a Mac or control + hyphen on a PC.)

Use an em dash (—) without spaces on either side to emphasize or offset a phrase:

- Taking PrEP as prescribed—once a day, every day—is highly effective for preventing HIV.
- PrEP is a daily pill you take before exposure to HIV—much like taking anti-malarial medication before you travel to some regions.

(To insert an em dash, press option + shift + hyphen on a Mac or control + shift + hyphen on a PC. Use a true em dash, not "--").

Quotation marks
Use quotation marks when directly quoting a person or other source, to introduce new concepts or terms, and to refer to titles of short works (like articles and manuals).

- "Helping People Access PrEP: A Frontline Provider Manual on PrEP Research, Care and Navigation"
- PrEP stands for "pre-exposure prophylaxis" and is a proven HIV-prevention strategy.

***Punctuation around quotation marks* and parentheses**
Periods go inside quotation marks. Exclamation points and question marks go inside quotation marks if they are part of the quote.

- "U=U" is short for "undetectable=untransmittable."
- Remember, "U=U" stands for "undetectable=untransmittable"!
- I asked her, "Have you seen my red pen?"
- What the heck is an "em dash"?

Periods, exclamation points, and question marks go inside parentheses when the parenthetical stands alone, and outside parentheses when the parenthetical is part of a longer sentence.

- I looked everywhere for my phone. (It was in my hand.)

- I looked everywhere for my phone (which was in my hand).

Numbers, ranges, and percentages

Spell out a number when it starts a sentence. Otherwise, use the numeral, even for numbers less than 10. Numbers with more than 3 digits get commas.

In telephone numbers, use dashes without spaces between numbers. Use a country code if your reader is in another country.

- 555-867-5309

Use an en dash (–) to indicate a range or span of numbers.

- our 2017–2018 plan
- 50–60 Connects

Use numerals and a.m. or p.m., with a space in between. Don't use minutes for on-the-hour time, unless multiple times appear in the same piece of content.

- 9 a.m.
- 12:30 p.m.
- 9:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

Use an en dash between times to indicate a time period.

- 9:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Specify a time zone when writing about an event or something else people outside your local team would need to schedule:

- Pacific time: PT
- Mountain time: MT
- Central time: CT
- Eastern time: ET

Text formatting

Leave one space between sentences, not two.

Avoid underline formatting. Use italics to indicate the title of a major published work (like a book, movie, or album) or to emphasize a word.

- *AP Stylebook*
- Sometimes I *really* disagree with *AP Stylebook.*

States, cities, and countries

Spell out city and state names. In more formal content, don't abbreviate city names. In social media and in content where a more casual tone is important, abbreviations are fine.

Washington, DC, is funky. Use a comma before and usually after "DC," except when you follow it with an en dash (–):

- The organization, based in Washington, DC, opened its doors in 2001.
- The Washington, DC–based organization opened its doors in 2001.

On first mention, write out United States. On subsequent mentions, use "U.S." The same applies to any other country with a common abbreviation (e.g., United Kingdom, UK).

Sources
AP Stylebook
Chicago Manual of Style
The Radical Copyeditor: https://radicalcopyeditor.com
BETA style guide:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CX5gkT0jh3xsQgh13qMBM3xXN699upjk
GLAAD: www.glaad.org/reference
MailChimp: https://styleguide.mailchimp.com
Gender Spectrum: www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender
The Well Project: www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/why-language-matters-facing-hiv-stigma-our-own-words