

# SPANISH STYLE GUIDE

*November 2024*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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At the end, read  
more about a few  
of the activists and  
organizations that  
inspire us to write and  
keep updating this  
guideline.

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>SECTION 1: Race/Ethnicity/Peoples/Native Nation/Nationality and Gender</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>SECTION 2: LGBTQ+</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>SECTION 3: Disabilities</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>SECTION 4: Accessibility</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>SECTION 5: Age</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>SECTION 6: More Words to Use and Words Not Use</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>SECTION 7: Find Out More</b> .....	<b>11</b>

# INTRODUCTION

**OBJECTIVE:** This is a living document meant to be a supporting supplement to the General Maryland Style Guide. The purpose of this style guide is NOT solely to be a Spanish version of the English style guide. The purpose is to explore concepts, like the gendered language and terms for race/ethnicity, in our English style guide that may be difficult to translate into Spanish.

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## OUR NAME

La Unión Americana de Libertades Civiles, ACLU. (pronounced like ah-kl-oo)

## LATIN AMERICA IN THIS GUIDE

In this guide, we will refer to the region of Latin America many times because Spanish is spoken in many countries there. What countries do we mean when we say Latin America? We mean all countries in South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean countries. To exclude Caribbean countries stems from antiblackness. We do not measure Latinidad by one language, skin color, or culture. For example, within South America, Portuguese and French may be common in one country, rather than Spanish. Our countries have unique cultures and histories and also distinct foods and dances. The region of Latin America is beautiful, vast, and diverse.

Let's consider this diversity even in images in both the Latine community, immigrant community, and many more communities. There are intersections in all our issue areas.

**They and we are all connected.**

## A NOTE ON PROBLEMATIC WORDS

It is often best to center personhood in labels. It is off putting and othering to just say, for example "a blind" or "a trans." Centering the person would mean saying, "una persona ciega" or "una persona trans." Problematic words and ideas tend to either other a group, lump many groups together into one, or both. Problematic words breed a culture that doesn't consider the beauty in diversity or consider each person's unique qualities and personhood. Words are important.

## OVER-ARCHING THEMES IN THIS GUIDE

1. We will always identify someone with the labels they'd like to identify with, whether that be certain gender-neutral terms, with specific race/ethnicity/nation, etc.
2. We follow the community's lead.
3. Center people's humanity and personhood.
4. We strive to be explicit and specific, as well.

## SECTION 1

# Race/Ethnicity/Peoples/Native Nation/ Nationality and Gender

When we cover the stories of individuals, it is always a good idea to ask how they would like to be identified, especially if it is relevant to the story and the broader discussions about racism, transphobia, etc. Someone might prefer only their ethnicity, nationality, nation, village, race, gender nouns/phrases, etc. or any combination of them to self-identify. We will abide by the wishes of others in situations where we are writing their stories.

**We strive to be explicit and NOT use passive words.** When we call things out, an explanation is important.

Moving forward, ACLU of Maryland will use the broad term, Latine. Spanish speaking Maryland community members feel Latine matches the language better than Latinx. Still, Latine demands to be explained because it is not a common Spanish word.

## WHAT IS LATINE?

“Latine significa toda la comunidad latina, incluidas las personas que no se identifican con latino ni con latina. Es una palabra de inclusión para cada persona en nuestra maravillosa comunidad.”

Some Spanish speaking queer or non-binary folks may not identify with either the terms, Latino or Latina, but feel happy to identify with Latine, Latinx, or other terms/phrases.

## TERMS: BEING SPECIFIC ABOUT RACE & ETHNICITY

**Latine people** – “la persona latina”

- When possible, you can also use “la comunidad latina, la gente latina, las personas latinas, etc.” Try to use words like the community, the people, the persons as much as possible. Don’t just lump all individuals as the masculine form of a word.
  - Why? When we use words that mean men and everyone else, we are not being as inclusive as we can possibly be. So, saying people, community, persons, etc. is preferable because we include every

person, not every man plus everyone else. It is preferable to do this, rather than just saying Latinos (which could refer to Latino men or Latino men and everyone else.)

**Black person** – “la persona negra”

- Please also be aware that some people may prefer to self-identify with “afro, afrolatine, afroamericana, afrocubana, afrodescendiente, etc.”

**Asian people** – “la persona asiática”

- Be specific about the Asian continent when possible because Asia, like Latin America, covers a large region. It covers India to Thailand to Cambodia to North Korea and to Japan. This region is extremely large with people who have many different languages, cultures, shades, and features.
- Consider gendered languages and use the (x or e).
  - Examples: “filipine/x.”
- Avoid saying, “persona del medio oriente.” Better to say, “una persona del suroeste de Asia.” The term Middle Eastern is offensive, not correct, and geographically and culturally biased.

## **Indigenous Villages/Peoples** – “los pueblos indígenas”

- Remember to ask for specific nation’s name or how the person identifies.
- We also want to be careful about implying that there is only one indigenous identity when that is not the case. There are many diverse cultures, languages, and differences between Indigenous Nations. Better to say, “pueblos indígenas,” not the singular “gente indígena.”
- Be aware that while some Indigenous peoples in North America prefer to be called “Indians”, calling Indigenous people, “Indians,” in Spanish is a racial slur.

**Brown People** – “persona de color” is more common to say in Spanish.

**BIPOC** – (not very common in English either. Better to spell this out.) “significa las personas negras, los pueblos indígenas y las personas de color.”

- Avoid BIPOC term if the target is one specific group. Then it would be best to be specific about which group is mostly being targeted. For example, police violence in Maryland mostly targets Black people, not BIPOC.

**White people** – “la gente blanca”

## **WHY ISN’T INDIGENOUS INCLUDED WITH LATINE?**

For people who are native to the land, they do not usually identify with being called Latino/Latina/Latine because they are from their own distinct village/peoples/nation. These villages/nations collectively are from different pieces of land that colonizers have divided and called “Latin America.” Some folks though may call themselves Indigenous and Latine.

## **WHY DON’T RACE AND ETHNICITY ALWAYS GO TOGETHER?**

Our history is intertwined. Black, Indigenous, Asian, Spanish, and Portuguese roots are dispersed throughout Latin America because of immigration, colonization, rape, and slavery in this region. Unlike in the United States, interracial marriage was not illegal in many parts of Latin America but encouraged for awful “nazi-like” motives such as “lightening” the Black and Indigenous races or for much sadder reasons like having mixed children that could rise in the social hierarchy and escape slavery.

Finally, in the United States, Latine is considered an ethnicity, not a race. However, we acknowledge that race is a social construct and not biological. Therefore, we strive to identify the community as the race and/or ethnicities they self-describe.

## SECTION 2 LGTBQ+

Conversations about LGBTQ+ topics should originate from the Spanish speaking LGBTQ+ community because the communities who are experts in their own experiences should be leading these conversations. We seek to learn from and be guided by this community.

Please be aware that some Latine non-binary people and some Latine activists are using (x), (e), or those letters interchangeably to challenge the gender binary in English and Spanish. Not only with the word Latinx/e, but with other words like amigo, amiga, amige. We can quote people using the language in this way, but the ACLU should not be writing in this way until the Spanish speaking LGBTQ+ community decides on and moves forward with this language change.

While some may say Latinx/e is a “whitewashed” term, the same argument can be made about Latino or Hispanic. However, Latinx, in fact, has its roots in Latine LGBTQ+ spaces, not white “American” spaces.<sup>1</sup> At the ACLU of Maryland, we are guided by the voices of those impacted by racism, transphobia, or combined systems of oppression. If some folks in the Latine LGBTQ+ community feel excluded, we will do our best to identify the whole community with the most inclusive term.

We will still respect and call individual Latine people whatever they would like to be called, whether that be Hispanic, Chicana, Latino, etc. However, when speaking about the whole group, especially when a part of that group is impacted by both racism and transphobia, we will say Latine. And whenever possible, use inclusive words that mean all people, all persons, the community, the people: “todas las personas, la comunidad, la gente.”

<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). The word history of latinx. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved July 5, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-history-latinx#:~:text=Latinx%20was%20originally%20formed%20in,pronounced%20when%20it%20was%20created>.

### IMPORTANT NOTE ON NON-BINARY PERSONS

Ask non-binary Latine individuals how they would like to identify. They may say, “No soy hombre ni mujer,” “Soy una persona de género no binario,” “Soy un padre no binario” or they may even use the masculine or feminine, etc. However they identify, we will identify them as such.

In legal documents, it is better to use the full name of a person, rather than only the first name or last name(s) with “senor or senora.”

### LGBTQ+ TERMS TO USE

- Queer in Spanish is spelled the same – queer.
- Gay in Spanish is spelled the same – gai.
- LGBT+ is spelled the same – LGBT+.

- Bisexual is spelled the same – bisexual.
- Transgender person – “persona transgénero, persona trans”
- Cisgender person – “persona cisgénero.”
- Lesbian – “lesbiana.”
- Drag is spelled the same – drag.
- Gender non-conforming – “inconformidad de género.”
- Gender non-binary – “género no binario.”

### WORDS NOT TO USE

- No derogatory phrases or labels.
- “Un homosexual o un transgénero” – these words used in this way are dehumanizing. It is better to include person. “Una persona transgénero,” not just a trans. “La comunidad homosexual,” rather than “los homosexuales.”

## SECTION 3 Disabilities

Only mention disabilities if it is relevant. We strive to put “the person” first. For example, we would not say “epiléptico,” but rather “persona con epilepsia.” Second, we don’t use “mental age” or “mind of” someone younger. Finally, we also don’t identify people solely by what their disabilities are.

**AVOID:** “Discapacitados, y también es mejor no usar las palabras, sufre o afectada.”

**INSTEAD:** “personas con discapacidades”

**AVOID:** “Persona normal” or “able bodied”

We don’t use able bodied because it implies that people with disabilities don’t have able bodies. The term would then be non-disabled.

**INSTEAD:** “personas sin discapacidades”

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### FOR THE DEAF COMMUNITY

**AVOID:** “sordomudo, sordo”

**INSTEAD:** “La comunidad sorda, las personas sordas”

### FOR THE BLIND COMMUNITY

**AVOID:** “ciegos”

**INSTEAD:** “Persona ciega”

### FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Let’s avoid saying committed suicide because the word “committed” has connotations to sins or crimes. Suicide is then seen as a mere failure of will power rather than a lost battle against a mental illness. You wouldn’t say a person committed a heart attack or committed renal failure. They died from a heart attack. They died from renal failure. They died from suicide. Better to say “muero de suicido” and not “se suicidó.”

**AVOID:** “mudo, invalido, paralitico, enfermos mental, enfermos, anormal, etc.”

**INSTEAD:** “Persona sin habla, persona que utiliza comunicación aumentativa, persona con discapacidad física, persona con discapacidad psicosocial, persona con enfermedad mental, persona con discapacidad psíquica, persona con discapacidad psiquiátrico, persona con discapacidad intelectual, persona con síndrome de down.”

## SECTION 4 Accessibility

We seek to keep researching and learning more ways to make our content more accessible for folks, including offering more video and audio content and tailoring visuals, emails, and web content.

Below is just one quick example of how we are increasing content accessibility, while keeping in mind our race equity and justice goals. Last month, we created language on accessibility in emails with emojis.

**Let's talk about emojis that have skin tones!** Color-blind folks cannot access our content if there is not enough contrast in the email/image/web content.

The emojis with white skin do not have enough contrast against emails in light mode, hindering accessibility. In the same vein, the emojis with black skin do not have enough contrast against emails in dark mode, hindering accessibility for color-blind folks who need contrast to see and access the content.

At the ACLU of Maryland, we strive to pick emojis that offer enough contrast against the dark and light modes and convey the same meaning as the original emoji, without always defaulting to the neutral yellow skin tone emoji.

For example, instead of a thumbs up 👍 emoji, a green check mark ✅ can be used. A waving hand 🙌 could be a smiley face 😊. The heart hands 🤍 can simply be a heart emoji ❤️.

## SECTION 5 Age

If age is not relevant, it's always best to not mention it.

**AVOID:** “Viejos, viejitos, mayores, ansianos, decrepitos”

**INSTEAD:** “Las personas de edad avanzada, la gente mayor, personas mayores”

**AVOID:** “Menores de edad, menores”

Why? We do not use “menores” because it has connotations to children in jails.

**INSTEAD:** “Jóvenes, criaturas”



## SECTION 6 More Words to Use and Not Use

- **Let's not say, African American, unless people self-identify as "afroamericanos."**

If not, just use black people o "la gente negra."

- **Stay away from Hispanic/"hispano," unless the person self-identifies this way.**
- **We should avoid saying, at risk communities/disadvantaged/poor. "La gente opresada."**

Better to describe it like, "comunidades afectadas por estas políticas o personas."

- **Don't use "los pobres."**

Use "la gente con bajos recursos."

- **Never say illegals/"ilegales."**
- **We shouldn't be calling humans:**

Inmates/"presos"/criminals/"criminales"/convicts/"condenados."

Instead let's refer to people in jail as "la gente en la cárcel o la gente regresando a la comunidad desde la cárcel."

- **Let's avoid saying victims/"victimas."**

Many times, it is often better to describe people who have survived something, "sobrevivientes."

When it is very awkward to use "sobrevivientes," you could also use "experimentó \_\_\_algo\_\_\_."

- **Civilians/"civiles" sounds very militaristic, so we avoid it.**

- **We don't say citizens/"ciudadanos." We strive to say instead, "una persona con ciudadanía estadounidense."**

We have stepped away from saying citizens and non-citizens, because we want community members to feel that they are still human and a valuable part of the community, whether they have papers or not. So, we describe U.S. citizens as people who have U.S. citizenship, not who are "legal" citizens.

- **Let's try not to characterize people solely by their situations. We try not to say the homeless. Instead, we use "personas sin hogar."**
- **If speaking about access to abortion, remember to not only see this issue as a women's issue. Let's be inclusive and include "todas las personas que puedan quedar embarazadas."**

We keep away from pro-choice and instead, we say "activistas del derecho al aborto."

- **Let's give community members an opportunity to be the leading voice in their case by not describing them just as "clientes de la ACLU."**

We can get creative to center the community by saying:

"Estamos representando a \_\_\_nombre de demandante\_\_\_."

"\_\_\_Nombre de demandante\_\_\_ esta demandando a \_\_\_nombre de demandado\_\_\_."  
(I like this one best.)

- **“No somos una ‘nación de inmigrantes.’”**

“Esta tierra fue hurtada de los pueblos Indígenas.”

“Descendientes de esclavitud en América NO son inmigrantes.”

- **Do not refer to ALL Latinx/e people as Spanish people.**

Spanish people are from Spain.

Spanish speakers are anyone who speaks Spanish.

Latine people are those who are from or have ties to countries in Latin America.

- **It is best not to assume that all Latine folks know Spanish or that all people who speak Spanish are Latine.**

Someone who only speaks Spanish is not always a Latine person.

Likewise, a Latine person might not be able to speak Spanish.

- **Use “reforma de la justicia legal” instead of “reforma de la justicia penal.”**
- **Rather than “habitantes y residentes,” we try to use as often as possible, “persona de la comunidad,” “gente de la comunidad,” or simply “la comunidad.”**

We do this because we want to emphasize that people, regardless of their legal or home status, are fully part of their community.

- **“Manifestación” rather than “protesta.”**

“Protesta” carries a negative connotation in Spanish. “Manifestación” has a more positive connotation.

- **Formal vs. informal.**

Formal, when doing press releases, legal letters, formal documents, etc.

Informal when writing social media posts, graphics, flyers, etc.

- **Northern Triangle sounds very militaristic. The ACLU of Maryland will stay away from this term and instead name the 3 countries. It is a good rule of thumb to always be specific.**
- **“El Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas de Estados Unidos (ICE, por sus siglas en inglés).”**

## SECTION 7 Find Out More

Here are just a few organizations and activists who inspire us and influence this style guide:

- **Mhol Perú:** <https://www.facebook.com/mholperu>
- **Clóset de Sor Juana:** [https://www.facebook.com/ClosetSorJuana/?locale=es\\_LA](https://www.facebook.com/ClosetSorJuana/?locale=es_LA)
- **DIKÉ LGBT+:** <https://dike.org.sv/>
- **Reinas de la Noche:** <https://reinasdelanoche.org.gt/>
- **Más Igualdad en Perú:** <https://www.masigualdad.pe/>

*If you know of any more amazing organizations, throw them our way, so we can learn from them and list them here please!*

**ACLU** Maryland