

Language, Please



Tips for tricky conversations
with your colleagues
(*and yourself*)

LP



Whether you take issue with someone else's story, you've got questions about your own reporting, or colleagues keep tapping you for advice on covering identities or communities they think you're a part of, these situations can lead to complicated conversations.

We're here to help.

Some scenarios



1

I have concerns about someone else's story

- Call for backup
- Give a heads-up
- Assume best intentions
- Get specific
- Align with a shared value
- Add context
- Draw the line

2

I'm writing about some of my own identities/communities

- Establish boundaries with yourself
- Embrace intersectionality
- Keep going
- Establish boundaries with others
- Redirect
- Find your people

3

I'm writing about identities/communities I'm not a part of

- Check your assumptions
- Start with resources you can access yourself
- Learn from existing work
- Ask your editor
- Ask a DEI+ pro
- Ask a colleague (thoughtfully)
- Don't just accept/reject
- Recognize the work

1



I have concerns about someone *else's* story



Call for backup

Your manager might be in a position to offer advice and raise the issue on your behalf. If you're taking the strong position that a story shouldn't run at all or requires a correction, it's especially important that you don't go it alone. If the colleague whose work you have concerns about is your manager, reach out to a different trusted senior staff member for guidance and support.



Give a heads-up

If you've decided to approach a colleague directly, ask if they have a few minutes to talk. In advance, share a link to the story you'll be addressing.



Assume best intentions

Be curious. It's possible colleagues aren't purposely flouting best practices, and while that doesn't excuse harmful coverage, it does clarify what it will take to make change. It's also possible you're coming across a larger issue not limited to a single case. If so, see "draw the line" on page 5.



Get specific

Identify words or lines where you see an opportunity to add nuance. Offer alternatives. If the term or frame you take issue with is in a quote from a source, ask if there were other options that could be used to make the same point. Refer to **Language, Please** and other style guidance for support.

Cont.

> **Align with a shared value**

Identify a commitment your newsroom has publicly made that's guiding your feedback.

Example:



“Your language is offensive”



“I know we’re interested in driving new, productive conversations about mental health, and I’ve found...”

> **Add context**

Explain to your colleague the difference your suggestions would make and why.

> **Draw the line**

If you're noticing persistent patterns and the situation has become untenable, access channels within your workplace to address editorial concerns. You might also connect with an outside ally or organization that can support you on next steps to better align your newsroom's editorial practices with diversity, equity, and inclusion.

2

I'm writing about some of my *own* identities/communities

> **Establish boundaries with yourself**

Before you begin, have a conversation with yourself to gut-check how much you want to access your personal networks in your reporting.

> **Embrace intersectionality**

Even for stories that overlap with your experiences, consider how your insights and potential gaps in understanding do and don't apply to this story and discuss with your editor.

> **Keep going**

If your pitch doesn't get greenlit right away, don't take it as a no. Follow up with specifics on the story's timeliness, so you don't miss the news moment. And if you do get a no on this one, try again with a new story. That said, if you're noticing a pattern, see "draw the line" on page 5.

> **Establish boundaries with others**

For journalists of color and others from underserved groups who can feel a personal and moral obligation to cover stories affecting their communities, the risk of burnout is real. Letting people know if you need to step away is okay and key to your well-being. Be mindful of the emotional toll this work can take and consider ways to make space for yourself as needed.

Cont. 

> **Redirect**

If colleagues keep asking for advice on stories related to your identities and that's not part of your job description and is leaving you overburdened, take steps to redirect these requests. For example, let your manager know, or seek guidance from someone you trust. We'd encourage you to point your colleagues to the Language, Please [style guidance](#), [inclusivity reader directory](#), and [editorial tools](#) as resources.

This is what we're here for!

> **Find your people**

Does your company have [identity-based](#) Employee Resource Groups? Are there private Slack channels, support spaces, or other ways you can find community as you report on issues that affect you deeply? Engage in these spaces and conversations with others who might be having a similar experience.

3

I'm writing about identities/communities
I'm *not* a part of



> **Check your assumptions**

Don't approach a colleague you're pretty sure "matches" your story and ask them to review your work. This is tokenizing, asking a lot, and might not even get you what you need. But that doesn't mean you're on your own.

Read on!

> **Start with resources you can access yourself**

Like [Language, Please](#) and other guidance from associations dedicated to specific identities and communities. (See the Language, Please "[essential resources](#)" list.)

> **Learn from what's out there**

Check what stories people are sharing within their trusted networks — especially people directly impacted by what the story is about. Note the terminology and framing used in the pieces endorsed by individuals and groups you admire from within the identities/communities you're covering. Include local, independent, issue-specific, and community-based sources in your scan.

> **Ask your editor**

Tap them for reporting guidelines and style standards. Find out if there are people on staff whose jobs (and pay) cover advising on specific issues and how to approach them.

Cont.

> **Ask a DEI+ pro**

Does your organization have a DEI+ department with relevant expertise? Set up some time to consult with them.

> **Ask a colleague (thoughtfully)**

After you've done the above, if you still need guidance, find someone in your newsroom with expertise on your topic. Read what they've written and tell them why you are going to them (their previous work or area of study, current beat, etc.). Ask if they're willing to field a question or two, and find out how they'd like to communicate. A great question no matter the topic: "What has every other story on this subject gotten wrong or missed?"

Respect their time and boundaries.

> **Don't just accept/reject**

Take time to understand the reasoning behind the guidance you get, so you can use it to inform your thinking next time.

> **Recognize the work**

If a colleague has helped with your coverage, follow up with a link to your published story and a specific thank-you, and offer to credit them in a more public way (with their permission).

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Overall



Act early and often

Don't wait until the final copy edits! Start these conversations at pitch meetings, and don't stop until (or after) the story's live.



Make it open

So everyone learns. Create, share, and iterate on a go-to database for reliable guidance. Share updates to style guidance frequently and with the whole newsroom. Seek opportunities for public conversations about decisions on terminology and framing in meetings or on Slack.



Let people opt in (and out)

Invite all editorial staffers to indicate how they want to be involved in advising on coverage of topics they know and care deeply about, including how they do and do not want to be approached.

Final note to editors:

It's a gift when someone on the team is excited to bring fresh, authoritative insights to identity/community reporting. Supporting and amplifying those voices will make your coverage stand out and draw talent the news needs. Visit languageplease.org for more guidance.