

# STYLE GUIDE FOR REPORTING ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

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## WHY CHANGE MEDIA STYLE GUIDES ON COVERING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

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This guide is born out of conversations I've had with First Nations journalist colleagues over the years on how media should write about and describe Indigenous people within their reports and stories.

Time and again we saw how stories inaccurately referenced communities or perpetuated stereotypes and misconceptions. How can we go about changing this?

The Canadian Press (CP) Stylebook is the go-to reference book for journalists and media newsrooms across Canada. It is required reading for university and college media courses, and many media outlets have based their own style guides on it.

Previously, in the 17th edition (2013) of the CP Stylebook, the section called "Aboriginal Peoples" instructs journalists it is acceptable to use terms like "Canadian Indians," explains that Métis "is usually taken to mean anyone of mixed Indian and European ancestry," and starts off the section with the term "Canada's Aboriginal Peoples" – a term often rebuked as it implies Canada owns Indigenous people.

I present workshops to newsrooms and journalism classes on best practices for reporting on Indigenous stories. A large part of the discussion is about terminology – "what terms do we use?" As I describe the current preferences, a reporter or professor will point out the differences in the CP Stylebook.

After a workshop at a subdivision of CP, we learned they are aware changes need to happen in how they cover Indigenous stories. So we gathered a small group of Indigenous journalists and scholars to develop a style guide accurate and respectful of Indigenous people. They shared their perspectives on what should go into the CP Stylebook, which terms should be used, which should not.

What did we learn? The history and preferences are varied and complex. It is difficult to agree on a catch-all term that respectfully encompasses the diverse people who are now referred to as Indigenous. Some do not even like that term. A recurring theme in all the discussions is that self-identification is crucial to respectful and accurate cover of Indigenous people and communities. Ask what they prefer to be called.

We submitted this document to the Canadian Press Stylebook editor. We are happy to see many of the points have been incorporated – in some places, verbatim – in the newly-released 18th edition of the stylebook.

Given that some points were not included, we are making this document publicly available for all media to consult and implement.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report in 2015. Three of its 92 recommendations were aimed at media specifically. This includes #86, which calls on "Canadian journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations."

Most institutions are slow to include such education, and if so, they are not mandatory.

As Joyce Hunter, a contributor to this guide, says, "What people don't learn from their education system, they look to the media to fill their information gap. What the public fails to realize is the journalists covering Indigenous issues went to the same schools they did, and received the same education they did on these issues."

This Style Guide for Reporting on Indigenous People is a general guide and serves as a quick reference. It does not make up for the lack of education in Indigenous history and perspectives. Journalists should take it upon themselves to properly research the communities in the region they cover.

Media plays a key role in educating the public on Indigenous communities. It could start with describing the communities in a fair, accurate and respectful way.

**LENNY CARPENTER**

*Indigenous Reporters Program manager  
Journalists for Human Rights*

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## INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN CANADA

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Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of what is now called Canada. The history, identities and languages of Indigenous people are complex and diverse.

Whenever possible, be specific about the group, people or community, and defer to the community or individual(s) on how they prefer to be identified. In all instances, capitalize.

Indigenous is preferred over the term Aboriginal. Many Indigenous people have opposed the term in large part due the connotation of the Ab-prefix, which is frequently compared to “abnormal” (not normal) or “absent” and “abduct” (away). Additionally, the term was imposed onto Indigenous people and various Indigenous groups opposed it when Aboriginal was written into the Canadian constitution in 1982. Avoid using Aboriginal unless it is in a legal context, it is part of a proper name (e.g. Aboriginal People’s Television Network) or the subject identifies themselves as such.

This shift to Indigenous has been recognized by the federal government, as it renamed its Aboriginal Affairs department to Indigenous Affairs. Other organizations and

media outlets have also acknowledged this preference (ie. CBC Aboriginal to CBC Indigenous.)

Do not use “Canada’s Indigenous people” to describe the Indigenous people that are in the country. It is paternalistic and implies Canada owns Indigenous people. An alternative would be Indigenous people in Canada.

Avoid using “Indigenous Canadians,” “Native Canadians” and the like. Many Indigenous people, specifically First Nations and Métis, identify as being nations within a nation. Many First Nations have signed treaties, which by definition are agreements between sovereign nations. Moreover, throughout the history of Canada, the government and society in general has oppressed Indigenous people and so many do not identify as being Canadian.

Do not rely on the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada website on how to identify a community or people. Instead, refer to the community or council’s website.

Indigenous people in Canada are categorized by the Canadian government into three distinct groups: First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

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## FIRST NATIONS

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First Nations people are the largest Indigenous group in Canada. There are 618 First Nations recognized by the Canadian government.

Other terms colloquially used but not recommended: Native, Indian. The term Indian is considered offensive and should be used only in historical or legal contexts (e.g., Indian status, Indian Act). Avoid the terms in copy and display copy, unless they are preferred by the subjects themselves or are part of a proper name (e.g., Toronto Native Canadian Centre, Native Women’s Association of Canada).

The Canadian government categorizes First Nations people between Status and Non-Status: Status means they are registered with the federal government and member of a community recognized by the government. Non-status means they identify as First Nations but either 1) are a member of a community not recognized by the federal government 2) or are descended from parent(s) who lost status due to various circumstances, usually due to strict or oppressive terms under the Indian Act (previously one could become enfranchised and lose status by going to university, voting, becoming a professional like a lawyer or doctor, etc.) 3) or they

voluntarily gave up their status, usually for personal political reasons.

Whenever possible, identify which First Nation an individual is affiliated with. As more than half of First Nations people do not live on-reserve, it is best to state such affiliation and where they currently reside. Not all individuals who are a member of a First Nation have resided in that community.

Use First Nation or community instead of “reserve,” unless the story is specifically about the tract of land allocated to a First Nation. Do not use “reservation,” which is U.S. terminology.

Band councils should only be used to describe First Nations leadership that operate under the Indian Act. Some First Nations, especially those in B.C. and the Yukon, have signed self-government agreements and “band” or “band councils” are viewed with contempt or disapproval in those communities.

Avoid the use of “tribe” to describe a First Nation group (ie. Dene, Blackfoot.) unless the subject prefers (Blood tribe). Use people or nation instead. Do not use “tribal affiliation” as it is U.S. terminology and generally unacceptable to First Nations people in Canada.

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## MÉTIS

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Métis is a nation-specific term connected to an Indigenous people in western Canada.

Métis people evolved from the intermarriage of First Nations people and European settlers beginning in the 18th century and arose with their own specific identity, unique culture, traditions, language and way of life.

Today, Métis people are represented by the Métis National Council (MNC), which defines Métis as “a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation.”

This historic Métis Nation emerged in the historic Northwest during the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, according to the MNC. This area is known as the historic Métis Homeland, which includes Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, and extends into Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and the northern United States.

Métis should only be used in circumstances where individuals and communities use the term “Métis” themselves. Do not use Métis to refer to mixed-descent individuals, as there are many First Nations people who have some non-First Nations ancestry, but are members of First Nations communities. Use Métis to refer to those who identify as Métis and belong to Métis communities as described above. Métis is best understood as a communal identity, and not for describing mixed-descent individuals.

The term can be used accented or unaccented, but the accented “Métis” is the most common usage among Métis themselves. In certain formal agreements, like the Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim, the term is unaccented.

“Indigenous and Métis” or “Aboriginal and Métis” should never be used, as Métis are definitionally Indigenous and Aboriginal. This language usage implies that Métis are less than fully Indigenous/Aboriginal and is generally considered offensive.

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## INUIT

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Inuit is an Indigenous group comprised of circumpolar maritime people. They are also found in Greenland, Alaska, and Russia.

Inuit means people in the Inuktitut language while Inuk means person. Do not use “Inuit people” as it is redundant. As an adjective, use Inuk when describing a person (ie. “an Inuk Doctor”) but use Inuit if describing more than one (ie. “three Inuit doctors”). Inuit can be used as an adjective for everything else (e.g. “Inuit drum, Inuit community”).

Three-quarters of Inuit in Canada live in 53 communities across the northern regions of Canada in Inuit Nunangat, which means “the place where Inuit live.” Inuit Nunangat is comprised of four regions: Inuvialuit (NWT and Yukon), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (Labrador). About 43,455 Inuit live in these regions. There is a fifth Inuit group called Nunatukavut, the Southern Inuit of Labrador. They are not yet recognized by all the other groups and their land claim is being negotiated.

There are many dialects of Inuktitut and vary from region to region, along with spellings and pronunciation. Use what the subject prefers. Inuit from Nunatsiavut are called

Nunatsiavummiut (sometimes Labradorimuit but this is an older term), Inuit from Nunavik are called Nunavimmiut, Inuit from Nunavut are called Nunavimmiut, and Inuit from Inuvialuit are called Inuvialiummiut.

Do not use Eskimo. It is a Cree word and means “eater of raw meat” and is considered offensive.

Inuit are often confused with First Nations but they have different terminology and governmental systems. Inuit do not have chiefs but community leaders, though in some communities they have a mayor. Inuit do not live on reserves. Inuit do not subscribe to the concept of nationhood. Instead they have homelands. Never use Native refer to Inuit. Also, many Inuit prefer to be called Inuit instead of Indigenous.

Inuit are represented nationally by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (Inuit United in Canada) which is led by a president.

Do not describe the Inuit as being Arctic people, as Nunavik and Nunatsiavut are located south of 60 in the subarctic.

Inuit are not to be confused with Innu, a First Nations people who reside in Eastern Quebec/Labrador.

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## TWO SPIRIT PEOPLE

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Two Spirit is a contemporary, pan-Indigenous term specific to the Indigenous LGBT2QQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two Spirit, queer, questioning, intersexual, asexual) community.

Two Spirit acknowledges the varied and diverse traditions of gender and sexual diversity that have and continue to exist within many Indigenous nations of North America. Two Spirit is largely used by First Nations and Métis and less commonly within the Inuit community.

Two Spirit is a self-identified term which encompasses multiple understandings of gender (how a person presents their identity, e.g. non-binary, male, female, genderfluid, etc.) and sexuality (who a person is sexually attracted to, e.g. pansexual, lesbian, heterosexual, gay, etc.) There is no universal definition of Two Spirit; some say they may “have a male and female spirit” while others view the acknowledgement of spirit as more of a metaphor. Two Spirit identification is supplementary and complementary to older related terms which exist within distinct Indigenous

nations such as agokwe and ininikaazo in the Anishinaabe language or ayahkwêw in the Plains Cree language.

Various spellings of Two Spirit exist, including upper-case, lower-case, and hyphenated or with a number (e.g. 2Spirit, Two Spirit, two-spirit, etc.). 2S is the most common abbreviation. There is no consensus on spelling but Two Spirit is most frequently used. The phrase “two-spirited person” is considered an older usage and is falling out of favour, with “Two Spirit person” now most frequently indicated, but some people still prefer the former.

The term Two Spirit was coined in 1990 at a gathering of LGBTQ2 Indigenous people near Winnipeg with the intent

of creating a non-pejorative collective term. Older terms coined by early colonial explorers such as “berdache” are considered offensive and not to be used.

Not all Indigenous people that fall within the LGBTQ2QA spectrum identify as Two Spirit, and Two Spirit people also hold multiple identities (e.g. “Two Spirit Anishinaabe and queer,” “Two Spirit Maliseet and gay”). Always check with the source for how they identify, which pronouns they use, and do not presume any identities. Be aware that “outing” a person (i.e. disclosing their status as Two Spirit, transgender, gay, etc.) without their explicit consent can potentially compromise their physical safety.

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## CONTRIBUTORS:

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**ANGELA STERRITT** is an award-winning Gitxsan journalist and writer, who belongs to the Gitanmaax band in northwest British Columbia. Angela has worked as a journalist for close to twenty years and has been with the CBC since 2003. Her reports have appeared in the Globe and Mail, CBC’s The National and The Current, and various other national and local news programs. She currently works with CBC Vancouver as television, radio and online reporter, producer and host. She has also worked with CBC Indigenous since its inception in 2013.

**ADAM GAUDRY**, Ph.D. is Métis and an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Native Studies and Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. Adam’s research explores nineteenth-century Métis political thought, the Métis-Canada “Manitoba Treaty” of 1870, and Canada’s outstanding obligations under the act. This project argues for the maintenance of a respectful and bilateral political relationship between the Métis Nation and the Canadian people as treaty partners. This work is being revised into a book for publication with the University of Manitoba Press. Adam received his Ph.D. from the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria, and both his MA in Sociology and BAH in Political Studies from Queen’s University. He was a Henry Roe Cloud Fellow at Yale University and currently a co-

investigator in the Métis Treaties Project. Adam’s work has been published in Native American and Indigenous Studies, The Wicazo Sa Review, aboriginal policy studies, the Canadian Journal of Native Education, the Osgoode Hall Law Journal, and The Canadian Encyclopedia. He also has several chapters in edited collections on Métis identity, research ethics, and methodology.

**MAUREEN GOOGOO** is an award-winning journalist from the Mi’kmaw community of Indian Brook First Nation (Sipekne’katik Band) in Nova Scotia. Maureen has been working in journalism for 30 years. She has worked as a reporter, video journalist, producer and editor for news media outlets such as the Micmac News, CBC Radio, the Chronicle-Herald and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. Maureen is currently the founder/ Editor-in-Chief of Kukukwes.com, a news website that covers Indigenous news in Atlantic Canada. She is also the host/producer of Kukukwes.com - The Radio Show that airs weekly on CKDU-FM community radio in Halifax. Maureen has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Saint Mary’s University in Halifax, a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Journalism from Ryerson University in Toronto, and a Master of Science in Journalism from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York City.

**OSSIE MICHELIN** is a freelance Inuk journalist based out of North West River, Labrador, and Montreal. Ossie works in print, photography, radio, and video. The son of a trapper and descended from a long line of storytellers, he brings insights on the Indigenous world and North with a capital “N.” Ossie covered Elsipogtog First Nation’s 2013 fight against fracking in New Brunswick as a correspondent for APTN. Ossie’s photo of Amanda Polchies kneeling in front of a line of police while holding an eagle feather during that event was recently named best photograph in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights’ Points of View: A National Human Rights Photography Exhibition. Ossie was also on the ground covering the opposition to the damming of Muskrat Falls by Labrador’s crown energy corporation, Nalcor, last year.

**JOYCE HUNTER** is Omushkego (Cree) from Weenusk First Nation (Peawanuck). After receiving her journalism diploma from Durham College in 2003, Joyce began her career at The Daily Press in Timmins as a general assignment reporter/photographer. She then moved on to Wawatay News to work as a reporter before being promoted to editor. She has spent more than 10 years working as a journalist and has won national and provincial

awards for her work, including the 2008 Canadian Community Newspaper Award for Best News Story, and the 2006 Ontario Community Newspapers Association Award for Best News Story. She has a deep and personal connection to the legacy left by residential schools due to her older brother’s sudden death while attending St. Anne’s Residential School in Fort Albany First Nation. She successfully lobbied for his repatriation to her community many years after. Joyce received the Canadian Ethnic Media Association’s Innovation Award in 2013, alongside Rachel Pulfer and Robin Pierro of JHR, for co-creating the Northern Ontario Initiative, which led to the foundation of the current Indigenous Reporters Program.

**MELODY MCKIVER** is an Anishinaabe musician, composer, media artist, and arts educator of mixed ancestry from Obishikokaang Lac Seul First Nation and Scottish/Lithuanian origins. Melody was previously the co-host of The Circle on 89.1FM CHUO Ottawa, a weekly radio show devoted to Indigenous music, news, and events. Melody holds an MA in Ethnomusicology at the Memorial University of Newfoundland (2014), and is also a BFA graduate of York University (2010). Melody formerly served as field coordinator in JHR’s Indigenous Reporters Program.

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## ABOUT

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**LENNY CARPENTER** is the Indigenous Reporters Program manager with JHR and is editor of this guide. He is a journalist and filmmaker from the James Bay community of Moosonee. A member of Attawapiskat First Nation, Lenny worked with Wawatay News, a First Nations newspaper covering northern Ontario, serving first as a reporter before becoming its editor and publisher. He also interned at CBC Radio in Thunder Bay. He has been with JHR since May 2016.

**ABOUT THE INDIGENOUS REPORTS PROGRAM:** JHR’s Indigenous Reporters Program was founded in 2013 and strives to increase the quality and quantity of Indigenous stories and voices in Canadian media by: 1) Creating a pathway of opportunity to journalism careers for Indigenous Peoples by training in remote communities, providing

scholarship and internship opportunities, eventually leading to jobs in the media industry, and; 2) By training journalists working in non-Indigenous newsrooms and journalism students at post-secondary institutions on best practices for reporting on Indigenous Peoples, cultures and issues.

### **ABOUT JHR:**

Journalists for Human Rights is Canada’s leading media development organization. JHR helps journalists build their capacity to report ethically and effectively on human rights and governance issues in their communities. Since 2002, JHR has trained over 17,000 journalists across 28 countries whose stories have reached over 65 million people worldwide.

JHR currently operates projects in Jordan, South Sudan, Syria, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Canada.

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