

from awareness to action

a practical guide for inclusive
copywriting & design



taking responsibility for our marketing

As marketers, we build stories for B2B and B2C brands across a variety of industries. This work is achieved through images and words that are brought to life and shared with audiences around the world by talented copywriters, designers, developers, SEOs, and project managers.

What we do directly impacts prospects, clients, and partners from all walks of life, which means we have an opportunity to affect change by advocating for **inclusion, equity, and accessibility** as we pursue our marketing goals.

It's our greater duty to...

- acknowledge our own biases and fight stereotypes,
- avoid making assumptions about other people,
- remain aware of how privilege manifests around us,
- and continue learning and growing as professionals.

And we can begin to do so by practicing the art of inclusive marketing.

“Organizations are at their best when they welcome, respect, and include people of all backgrounds.”

ANGELICA VEGA

Corporate Analyst at JPMorgan Chase & Co.
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access Advisory Committee Chair at Loyola Law School

what exactly is inclusive marketing?

Using marketing strategies and tactics that recognize and reflect the diverse communities around us. Inclusive marketing aims to reach a broader audience by considering unique differences in **age, race, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, body type, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and many other factors.**

embracing inclusive writing practices

All copywriters aim to produce the highest quality of copy each time they set out to write a blog, whitepaper, brochure, webpage, or other piece of content. They write with buyer personas in mind and work hard to create assets that will resonate with readers.

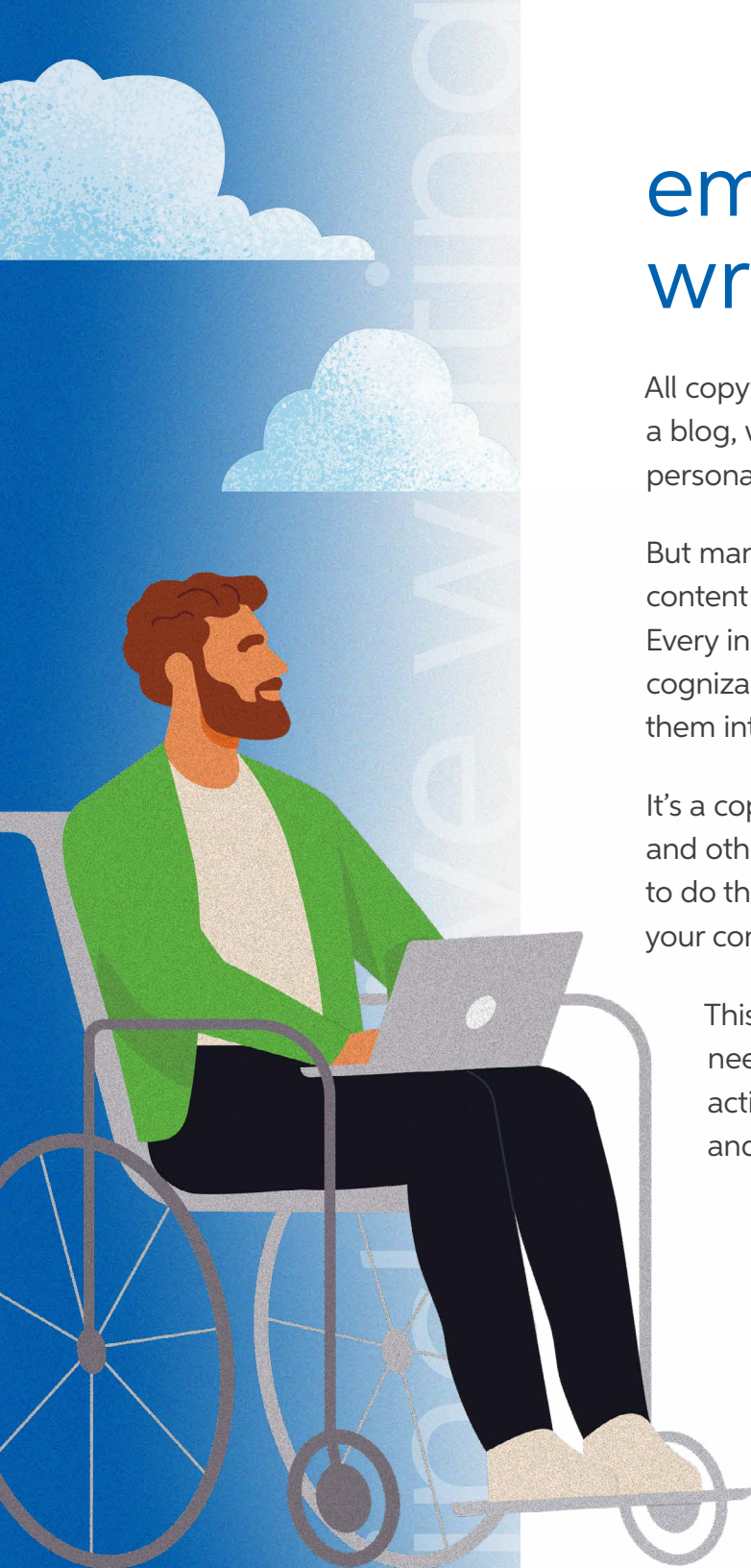
But many copywriters don't often consider all of the audiences that will consume their content or how their own personal worldview impacts the words that land on the page. Every individual's unique perspective may contain certain biases that we aren't even cognizant of until we take the time to learn, look out for, and avoid incorporating them into our writing.

It's a copywriter's duty to stay away from biased language, microaggressions, stereotypes, and other harmful phrases that have the potential to negatively affect readers. One way to do this is to **adopt a global-first approach**—assume every person in the world will read your content and try to be as bias-free as possible with your work.

This can be more difficult, however, when editing another person's content. If you need to address harmful language with a client or fellow writer, the best course of action is to briefly identify the problematic text, explain why it may upset readers, and offer some suggestions for revision.

“This word currently has ableist connotations. Let's use a different one to avoid offending our readers. What about this word?”

“This language has sexist origins, and may not speak to all of our readers equally. Let's switch it to this gender-neutral phrase instead.”



inclusive writing tips

Biased language can come in the form of metaphors, euphemisms, slurs, jokes, and specific words that may be sexist, racist, ableist, ageist, or hateful in other ways to a marginalized group or particular population—even if they aren't in the minority. We may use biased language indirectly, subtly, or unintentionally, but copywriters should always attempt to identify and weed out harmful words and phrases and adopt positive writing practices that respect all readers.

here are some tips to build awareness as an inclusive copywriter:

- Capitalize the B in Black when using this term as an identity or community
- Avoid using gendered pronouns unless familiar with a person's preferences (try using they or their instead)
- Avoid using ableist language (e.g., blind, one-deaf, paralyzed, suffering from)
- Avoid using racially or ethnically biased language (e.g., blacklisted, grandfathered in, gang, tribe)
- Avoid using ageist language (e.g., senior citizen, the aged, elderly)
- Avoid misusing language related to mental and emotional health (e.g., insane, manic, depressed, OCD)
- Avoid using gendered language and opt for more inclusive terms

girls → *women*

mankind → *humankind*

policeman → *police officer*

repairman → *technician*

wife, boyfriend → *partner*



using people-first language

The US Office of Disability Rights encourages everyone to leverage [people-first language \(PFL\)](#) to avoid ableism and instead place people before their disabilities. They suggest describing the condition or ability a person has, rather than initially labeling a person as a condition or ability. This is a great way to avoid stereotypes and stigmas and celebrate individuality. Note that some people do not use PFL because they take pride in labels, so it's smart to ask before writing about a specific person in your work.

disability-first

- autistic
- disabled adult
- handicapped parking
- the mentally ill
- wheelchair bound

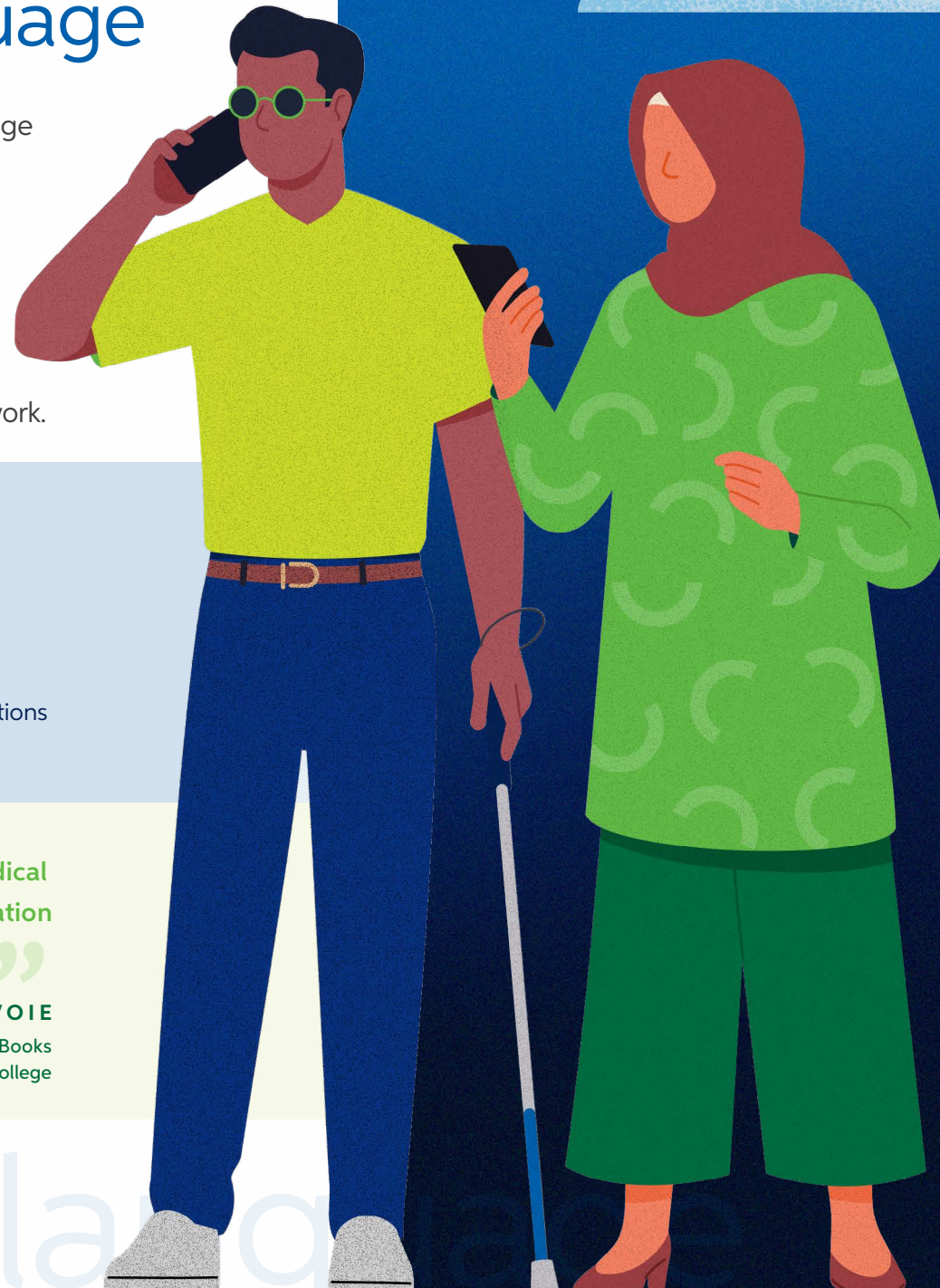
people-first

- has autism, with autism
- adult with disabilities
- accessible parking
- people with mental health conditions
- person who uses a wheelchair

“Radical copyediting helps language live up to its most radical potential, serving the ends of access, inclusion, and liberation rather than maintaining oppression and the status quo.”

ALAINA LAVOIE

Program Manager at We Need Diverse Books
Adjunct Professor at Emerson College



people-first language

implementing inclusive design practices

All marketers want audiences to engage with content and leave with something valuable—whether that’s tips on solving a certain challenge, information on beneficial products, or details to coordinate a demo. It’s not ideal when readers or website users encounter a piece of content and decide to walk away without further engagement.

But this happens more often than you’d think because marketers aren’t adopting inclusive design practices, which have the ability to impact a user’s experience with a wide range of marketing assets. And a big part of inclusive design is accessibility. **A universal design benefits everyone, regardless of ability.**

A recent survey found that more than [two-thirds of online shoppers](#) with disabilities will click away from a website if it proves too difficult to use, costing businesses valuable prospects and partnerships. Marketers must create websites and other forms of content that help users to easily find information, navigate text and options, and determine where they are within an asset.

here are some tips to implement inclusive design elements:

- Avoid using timeouts for websites and offers on landing pages
- Use diverse imagery when selecting stock photography, illustrations, and other designs
- Use colors that consider colorblindness and avoid using color as the sole way to convey info
- Use varied font sizes, bolding, and italics to keep content digestible
- Consider whether design elements are used to link areas of a website, convey information, or simply add visual interest and help users interpret them with ease
- Use descriptive hyperlinks to let screen readers, magnifiers, and other assistive technology achieve seamless navigation
- Use alt text with images and alternative descriptions for videos to communicate the purpose of graphics for those unable to view them
- Assess the structure and labeling of form fields for keyboard accessibility



is your team practicing inclusive marketing?

You have the power to encourage change by focusing on inclusion, equity, and accessibility as you formulate marketing plans, create marketing assets, and interact with partners and prospects. Embrace the tips found in this guide and continue your learning journey to do right by your clients and your own team.

helpful resources

- [Conscious Style Guide](#)
- [American Psychological Association Bias-Free Language Guidelines](#)
- [Linguistic Society of America Guidelines for Inclusive Language](#)
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#)

“Sagefrog is firmly dedicated to integrating inclusive writing and design practices, which enable us to demonstrate respect and effectively engage diverse audiences, while enhancing the value they derive from our content.”

SUZANNE MORRIS
Co-founder and Creative Director
Sagefrog Marketing Group

Work with our team to ensure
your marketing is inclusive.

Get in touch with Sagefrog today.

Sagefrog is a top-ranked B2B marketing agency and award-winning Best Place to Work®, with specialties in healthcare, technology, industrial, and business services. We accelerate client success through branding and integrated marketing delivered through deeper industry knowledge, smarter strategy and tactics, and faster turnaround and results. Our services include branding and strategy, websites and digital, content and inbound, and traditional marketing.

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