

Words matter, including when conducting research in nursing homes.

Researchers new to the field may unintentionally use words that indicate a lack of familiarity with nursing homes, and that in some instances convey disrespect.

The “Not That/Use This” table provides examples of common words to avoid and suggested alternatives, and the reasons why. Of course, cultural and other considerations may affect the terms preferred by individuals or groups, so in all circumstances the best practice is to inquire what terms are preferred.

NOT THAT	USE THIS	WHY?
WORDS REFERRING TO PEOPLE		
Subject	Participant	Recognize dignity as a human being
Patient	<i>If medical or short-term:</i> patient, resident <i>If not medical, or if long-term:</i> person, resident	Recognize that people are more than their medical condition
Elderly, senior, aged, old person	Older person/people/adult, or specify age range	Avoid ageist/ableist perceptions
Handicapped	People living with disabilities, or with a (specific) impairment	
Able bodied/normal	People without disability/impairment	
Vulnerable	People who are at increased risk of harm; may also specify what is meant by “vulnerable”	
Blind	Refer to specific level of vision impairment (blind, legally blind, limited vision, partially sighted)	Recognize differences in capacity
Deaf	People who are deaf or hard of hearing	
Wheelchair-bound, bed-bound	People who use a wheelchair People who are bed-bound	Recognize that people are more than their medical condition and functional status
Adjective-first descriptions (e.g., dementia/diabetic patient)	Person-first reference (e.g., person with dementia/diabetes)	
Terms referring to people as a care task (e.g., feeder, total assist)	People who require a (specific) type of care	
Terms of endearment (e.g., honey, baby, sweetheart)	Person’s preferred name (e.g., Mary, Mrs. Jones)	Recognize dignity as a human being
Loved one	Family member, friend, or specify particular relationship	Recognize that family and friends may not be in a loving relationship, and their role is not informal; in addition, some residents may have a specific designated decisionmaker
Caretaker, informal caregiver/partner	Family/friend caregiver, care partner, support person, or specify particular personal or legal relationship (e.g., legally authorized representative [LAR], healthcare power of attorney)	
Stakeholder	Interest groups, community members, people affected, collaborators	Avoid suggesting a power differential

NOT THAT	USE THIS	WHY?
WORDS REFERRING TO ACTIONS, FEELINGS, and BEHAVIORS		
Admitted, discharged, put, placed	<i>If medical:</i> admitted, discharged <i>If not medical:</i> moved in, moved out	Recognize dignity as a human being
Suffering from	Experiencing, living with	Recognize that conditions may not be a negative experience
Behavioral/psychological symptoms, acting out, combative	Behavioral expressions, reactions	Recognize that people express themselves through behaviors
“Still” engages (in an activity)	Engages (in an activity)	Avoid ageist perceptions
Noncompliant, nonadherent, uncooperative	Chose to not, refused	Appreciate that being asked does not override choice
Burden	Feelings	Recognize that not all people feel burdened
WORDS REFERRING TO PLACES and THINGS		
SNF	Skilled nursing facility (only if referring to short-term post-acute care)	Understand that clarification is helpful
Facility, extended care facility (ECF), institution	Nursing home, setting	Avoid an institutional tone
Dietary services	Dining services	
Bib	Napkin, cloth, apron, clothing protector	Avoid terms that are infantilizing
Diaper	Brief, underwear, undergarment	
WORDS REFERRING TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS		
Race/ethnicity	Race and/or ethnicity	Recognize that race and ethnicity are differ concepts
Mixed-race, non-white, other	Multi-racial, multiethnic; describe specific groups if possible	Avoid origin as a standalone noun; include context and describe populations as specifically as possible; solicit preferred term if possible
African-American	Black people	
American Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African (AMENA)	Refer to specific ancestry	
“Asian” for individuals not from Asia; Oriental	Specify between Asian and Asian American, or use national origin	
BIPOC (may convey a hierarchy)	People/persons of color; preferably describe the exact population(s)	
Hispanic, Chicano, Latina, Latino	Refer to country of origin	
Tribe	People, nation	
Indian	Native American, Native North American, or specify the nation	
Caucasian, white race	White, European American	
Minority, colored people	Refer to population-specific term	Use inclusive language
Underprivileged, marginalized	Underrepresented (e.g., in research)	Recognize that not all members of a given group have less