

Diversity,
Equity&Inclusion

LANGUAGE IN TECH

Editorial Style Guide Supplement

Version 1.1



INTRODUCTION

Words are powerful.

At Rule4, we take the written word seriously — ultimately, our business hinges on clear, effective communication. We have multiple professionally trained editors on staff, and we keep a house style guide where we track terminology and editorial preferences.

Technology is a fast-paced land full of acronyms and initialisms, and often the editorial focus stays strictly utilitarian — eliminate redundancy and legalese, ensure consistency, fill content and transitional gaps. But increasingly we’ve begun to look at the roots of tech terminology, and have committed to adapting some of those long-standing terms and phrases to be more respectful and inclusive. This style guide supplement collects and shares those decisions, in hopes that as others have inspired us to think critically and make changes, we will do the same.

Language is a living organism. A decision made today may not still be the right one in a few weeks or months. We do our best to stay on top of DEI language updates, but we welcome any suggestions and discussion. Just drop us a line!

RESOURCES

In addition to our preferred style manual, The Associated Press Stylebook, we owe much to the [GLAAD Media Reference Guide, 11th edition](#), and recommend it as a reference point for DEI language. Here are a few others we’ve found inspiring and helpful:



- Association for Computing Machinery, “**Words Matter: Alternatives for Charged Terminology in the Computing Profession,**” <https://www.acm.org/diversity-inclusion/words-matter>
- Kate Heinz, “**What Does DEI Mean in the Workplace?**” <https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/what-does-dei-mean-in-the-workplace>
- M. Knodel, “**Terminology, Power and Inclusive Language,**” Center for Democracy & Technology, <https://tools.ietf.org/html/draft-knodel-terminology-02>
- Jonathan R. Scarff, “**What’s in a Name? The Problematic Term ‘Provider,’**” National Library of Medicine, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8560107/>
- Stephen Shankland, “**Twitter engineers replacing racially loaded tech terms,**” CNET, <https://www.cnet.com/culture/twitter-engineers-replace-racially-loaded-tech-terms-like-master-slave/>
- Samantha Dunn, “**Inclusive Language in Tech: An Introduction,**” Splunk, https://www.splunk.com/en_us/blog/learn/inclusive-language-it.html

DEI STYLE GUIDE

Word List

Abort/terminate child process: Do not use; instead use *cancel*, *force quit*, *stop*, *end*, or *finalize* (depending on context).

Black-box/(gray-box)/white-box: Acceptable when referring to types of penetration testing (metaphor is related to light as visibility).

Blacklist/whitelist: Do not use; instead use one of the following acceptable alternatives:

Denylist/allowlist

Blocklist/allowlist

Deny/allow

Droplist/accesslist

Drop/permit

Block/permit

Black hat/white hat: Do not use; instead use *malicious/non-malicious*.

Dummy value: Do not use; instead use *placeholder value* or *sample value*.

Gender identity/LGBTQ: Though it's unlikely that language of this type would appear in any Rule4 content or deliverables, see the "GLAAD Media Reference Guide" for guidance on LGBTQ terminology: <https://www.glaad.org/reference>

Gendered language:

- Do not use *he/his* or *she/her* in singular gender-neutral contexts; use *they/their* for both singular and plural gender-neutral contexts.
- Do not use *guys* (e.g. "Hey, guys ..."); instead use *folks*, *people*, *you all*, or *y'all*.
 - Do not use gendered titles such as *chairman* or *congressman*; instead use *chairperson* or *congressperson*.

Grandfathered: Do not use; instead use *legacy status*.

Man hours: Do not use; instead use *person hours*, *engineer hours*, or *hours of work*.

Man-in-the-middle attack/attacker/vulnerability: Do not use; instead use *on-path attack/attacker/vulnerability*.

Master: Do not use as the default branch name in GitHub; instead use *Main* or an organization-specific term.

Master/slave: Do not use. Acceptable alternatives include the following:

*Primary/secondary primary/replica**

first/second

leader/follower

active/standby (e.g., one active server, and one standby server)

writer/reader (e.g., one MySQL write server and several read servers)

*coordinator/worker (e.g., one application that orchestrates
the activity of multiple application replicas)*

parent/helper

parent/child

producer/consumer

origin/clone

publisher/subscriber

Middleman: Do not use; instead use *jobber, wholesaler, distributor, or dealer*.

Provider: Do not use to refer to individuals in the medical field, or a medical practice;
instead use *physicians, nurses, or practitioners*.

Sanity check: Do not use; instead use *quick check, consistency check,
confidence check, or coherence check*.

Tribal knowledge: Acceptable as a reference to any unwritten information that is not
commonly known by others within a company. A tribe, in this sense, may be a group or
subgroup of people that share such a common knowledge.

* Preferred for DNS; see RFC 8499; note: this is considered the most broadly applicable alternative.

