



Language Checklist



Purpose

Language checklist for anyone writing content to ensure that they are portraying older people in positive and inclusive ways.

Age does not define who a person is; it is only one aspect of their life experience. Older people are not one homogeneous group.

If you want older people to seek your products and services then you need to tailor your messages accordingly and portray older people in strong, positive, and diverse ways that counteract ageism and stereotyping.

View all
age positive
communication
tools

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/
AgePositiveCommunicationToolkit](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/AgePositiveCommunicationToolkit)



Audience

Internal communication teams, external media agencies, program and service developers.

Words and language are powerful in conveying meaning, but sometimes how something is said can lead to unintended outcomes. This can feed assumptions, judgements and opinions and lead to ageism.

The way we portray older people in communications also affects how people think, feel and act towards different age groups and impacts on the self-image and beliefs of older people. When developing material ask yourself the question:

“How would I feel if those words and images were used to describe me?”



Quick language guide

1 **If possible, use the word ‘people’ on its own, without age-related qualifiers.**

e.g. “People in Adelaide told us that they want more opportunities and a variety of access options to easily remain connected with loved ones.”

2 **If it is relevant and important to include age-related qualifiers, start with the word ‘person’ or ‘people’.** (everyone is a person first, not a condition, an age group or a description).

e.g. “People in later life told us that they would like the option to access support to remain living independently at home.”

3 **If required, use ‘older people’ as the preferred general term.** (use with caution - be aware that a catch-all description for all older people will almost always be too general).

e.g. “Older people in South Australia are contributing as much to society as any other age group.”

4 **If you are talking about people who have particular conditions or needs, and mentioning them is relevant, use the phrase ‘a person living with...’**

e.g. “As a person living with dementia, Jane has unique experiences to share in helping to co-design services.”

Continued on next page

Avoid generalisations and assumptions



To do this, ask yourself:



- Have I represented the diversity (gender, cultural background, sexuality, life stage, abilities, interests) and uniqueness of older people in South Australia and are the factors I have used relevant to what I am writing/talking about?
- Have I included the voices and preferences of older people?
- Have I excluded adjectives that reinforce assumptions and negative stereotypes?
- Have I ensured that I am not making direct causal links between someone's age and their attitudes and/or physical abilities.

Use positive or neutral terms

- Does the language place the person first?
- Have I used clinical or assessment language inappropriately which may reinforce stereotypes?
- Have I focussed on people's abilities rather than their limitations and vulnerability?
- Am I highlighting the strengths and diversity of older people?
- Am I trying to elicit public responses which encourage a positive view of older people rather than negative responses that reinforce ageism?
- Have I asked the person or group of people how they would like to be referred to?

See examples on the next page


Examples of using positive or neutral terms

 Try using	 Instead of
The person's name	Dear, love or darling
Person or people (with 'older' qualifier, or 'in later life' used only if required to add meaning and context)	Old person, elderly
Participants (using specific age only if relevant)	Older participants
A person living with disability	A disabled person
A person living with dementia	A dementia patient/dementia sufferer
People living in assisted residential accommodation or residential aged care or aged care resident	Institutionalised elderly/nursing home resident/patient

Positive representation

Finally, there are common phrases that perpetuate tacit ageism or assumptions about what growing older 'should' be. Following are some positive alternatives and the rationale for changing the language. They can be used as a starting point to reflect on other examples of language that could perpetuate seemingly 'benign ageism' and to consider age-neutral alternatives.

See examples on the next page

 Numerous guides and resources exist to address ageism in language. Please refer to the list of useful resources in this toolkit.

Examples of positive representation

Instead of...	Trying using	Rationale
<i>The ageing/silver tsunami</i>	There is a growing population of Australians over the age of X	'Tsunami' suggests a destructive, negative force that should be feared.
<i>"X had a fall"</i>	"X tripped and fell"	'Had a fall' is medicalised passive language that is only used about older people; the more active use of the verb is age-neutral.
<i>A senior's moment</i>	Something I/they/you forgot	Forgetting details or information is a normal part of life, at any stage, and can be caused by stress or busyness. To suggest it is uniquely part of ageing is incorrect and perpetuates unhelpful stereotypes.
<i>Wealthy Baby Boomers</i>	The post-war 'Baby Boomers' are the most diverse generation of adults to date	The idea that all Baby Boomers are wealthy is factually incorrect.
<i>Successful ageing</i>	Living the life we want at any stage in life	While 'successful ageing' seems positive, it often carries assumptions about what 'successful' means and can glorify the exceptional few who run marathons or skydive, when each person's definition will be as unique as them.

For more information contact

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[Visit the Tackling Ageism website](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism)
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