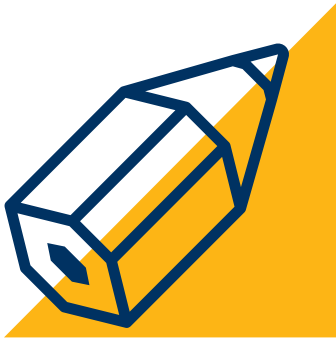


ENGAGE WITH AGE

Avoiding age stereotypes: A brief journalist's guide



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is meant to be a resource for journalists writing about the Retirement Center, our programs, or our constituents.

The Retirement Center organizes an Age Equity interest group that meets monthly and takes on projects like this guide.

Our goal is to raise awareness about the role of commonly used language in perpetuating ageist stereotypes. It is widely recognized that mass media influences our cultural norms. To help reduce the prevalence of age stereotyping, we hope to influence the way journalists cover the topic of aging and older people.

There are many more comprehensive guides on this subject. See: References & Additional Resources.

CONTACT

UC Berkeley Retirement Center
101 University Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720

510-643-5461
ucbrc@berkeley.edu

IS AGE RELEVANT?

"Jane Doe, 76, said....."
"Bob, an octogenarian homeowner...."

It is common practice to include the age of subjects quoted or described in news stories. However, this is often irrelevant to the story and can perpetuate stereotypes. **The first question to ask yourself is whether or not the person's age is relevant, and if not, leave it out.**

GROUP IDENTIFIERS

Seniors, elders, aging adults, or older adults?

When using a group term, first **consider whether or not there is a more precise and neutral way to describe the group** you are writing about, such people over 60, retired faculty, octogenarians, assisted living residents, etc.

If you need to use a group term, **ask the people you are talking about for the term they prefer.** Many people have strong feelings about these terms tied to a cultural understanding their meaning.

ADJECTIVES

Active, lively, spry, sweet, little, grandmotherly, feisty, etc.

Of course, avoid describing the subjects of your story with stereotyping language. Even using positive descriptions associated with an age group identifier, such as 'active senior', can imply this person is different than most people in their age group, perpetuating the idea that most 'seniors' are not active.

TONE

An 80-year-old yoga instructor? WOW!

Avoid a tone of surprise when covering a story about someone doing a job or task that would otherwise be unremarkable if their age were left out of the story. This conveys the inaccurate message that the subject is an exception to the rule of decline and inactivity with advancing age.

Consider instead what else could be interesting about the story. For example, have they been teaching for 50 years? What has changed about the work compared to when they started? Have their clients or clients' expectations changed over time? Etc.

REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ [Elevate Aging through Language: A Usage and Style Guide](#)
- ▷ [Words are Powerful: A Style Guide for Avoiding Ageist Concepts and Language](#)
- ▷ [ICAA's Guidelines for Effective Communication with Older Adults](#)
- ▷ [Media Takes: On Aging.](#)
- ▷ ["Elders?" "Older Adults?" "Seniors?" Language Matters](#)
- ▷ [Words to Age By: A Brief Glossary and Tips on Usage](#)
- ▷ [Successful Aging: What words to use, which to avoid in describing the older generation](#)