



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL *of* **Indigenous Health**

DEFINING ABORIGINAL PEOPLES WITHIN CANADA

The National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) *Journal of Aboriginal Health* (JAH) developed a guide to terminology for submitting authors, for use when writing about Aboriginal Peoples within Canada.

The *International Journal of Indigenous Health* (IJIH) edited and slightly modified this guide from its original format. The IJIH recommends use of this guide by researchers whose work is undertaken within the geographical boundaries of Canada, or as a reference for those doing comparative work across countries including Canada.

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL HEALTH ORGANIZATION TERMINOLOGY GUIDELINES

The National Aboriginal Health Organization Terminology Guidelines define terms describing or relating to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Readers should keep in mind that there is no single term to describe Indigenous Peoples. In Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples* is often used. In the United States, *American Indian*, *Native American*, *Native Hawaiian* and *Alaska Native* are commonly used. United Nations documents and organizations (and some Aboriginal scholars and advocates) use the term *Indigenous Peoples*. This guide gives the recommended usage. Regardless of the term you choose to follow, try to use it correctly and consistently.

The authors of this guide have tried to use current names and definitions that have been selected and defined by Aboriginal Peoples themselves. However, some of the terms listed here have strict legal definitions. They may seem outdated, but they are still necessary in certain contexts.

This guide does not list the names of individual Aboriginal nations. Rather, it provides inclusive terms that describe them collectively. Whenever possible, try to characterize Aboriginal people through their specific identities (e.g., a Haida painter, a Mohawk school, a Blackfoot publication). These types of identifications more accurately capture the unique aspects of people or things.

If you are unsure about names and terms, contact the Aboriginal person or organization you are writing about to learn which terms they prefer. Also note that many Aboriginal Peoples are using English transliterations of terms from their own languages to identify themselves (e.g., the Mohawk Nation is also called Kanien'kehá:ka; the Blackfoot, Siksika; the Chippewas, Anishinaabeg; and the Swampy Cree, Mushkegowuk).

Words like Aboriginal Peoples, First Nations Peoples, Indian, Inuit, Métis and Native should be capitalized as they are proper names of nations of people.

Avoid phrases such as “Canada’s First Nations,” but rather use “First Nations in Canada” to avoid the possessive nature of the first phrase.

Aboriginal Peoples

“Aboriginal Peoples” is a collective name for all of the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* of 1982 specifies that the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada consist of three groups – Indian (First Nations), Inuit and Métis. It should not be used to describe only one or two of the groups.

Aboriginal people – When referring to Aboriginal people with a lowercase people, you are simply referring to more than one Aboriginal person rather than the collective group of Aboriginal Peoples.

non-Aboriginal people (not peoples) – This term refers to anyone who is not an Aboriginal person. Note that the non stays lowercase.

Aboriginal nations – The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) used this term in its final report. RCAP defines an Aboriginal nation as “a sizeable body of Aboriginal people with a shared sense of national identity that constitutes the predominant population in a certain territory or collection of territories.” The term has gained acceptance among some Aboriginal groups.

Despite the wide use of Aboriginal as a proper noun by many Canadian and Aboriginal media, use the term only as a modifier.

- X The government’s new strategy will support increased business with Aboriginals.
- √ The government’s new strategy will support increased business with Aboriginal Peoples.

American Indian

American Indian is a commonly used term in the United States to describe the descendants of the original peoples of North America (see also Native Americans). Some people are dissatisfied

with this term because it retains the misnomer Indian in its name and covers peoples who consider themselves distinct from Indian Peoples, namely the Inuit, Yupik and Aleut Peoples in Alaska. The term is not popular in Canada.

Band

A band is a community of Indians for whom lands have been set apart and for whom the Crown holds money. It is a body of Indians declared by the Governor-in-Council to be a band for the purposes of the *Indian Act*. Many bands today prefer to be called First Nations and have changed their names accordingly (e.g., the Batchewana Band is now called the Batchewana First Nation).

Band Council

This is the governing body for a band. It usually consists of a chief and councillors who are elected for two- or three-year terms (under the *Indian Act* or band custom) to carry out band business, which may include education, health, water and sewer, fire services, community buildings, schools, roads and other community businesses and services.

Unless you are naming a specific band (e.g., the Bonaparte Indian Band), the word band should remain lowercase.

Elder

Elder is capitalized to indicate honour or title, used when describing Indigenous cultural and spiritual leaders. The lowercase elder should be used when generally referring to an Indigenous person who is a senior. Therefore, not all older Indigenous persons can be Elders, and some Elders can be relatively young.

Eskimo

Eskimo is the term once given to Inuit by European explorers and is now rarely used in Canada. It is derived from an Algonquin term meaning “raw meat eaters,” and many people find the term offensive. The term still is frequently used in the United States in reference to Inuit in Alaska, who are also referred to as Alaska Natives.

First Nation(s)

The term First Nations came into common usage in the early 1980s to replace band or Indian, which some people found offensive (see Indian). Despite its widespread use, there is no legal definition for this term in Canada.

First Nations people – Many people prefer to be called First Nations or First Nations people instead of Indians. The term should not be used as a synonym for Aboriginal people because it doesn't include Inuit or Métis. Because the term First Nations generally applies to both Status and Non-Status Indians, writers should take care in using this term. If they are describing a program that is only for Status Indian youth, for example, they should avoid using First Nations youth as it could cause confusion.

First Nation – Some communities have adopted First Nation to replace the term band. Many bands started to replace the word band in their name with First Nation in the 1980s. It is a matter of preference, and writers should follow the choice expressed by individual First Nations/bands.

The term First Nation is acceptable as both a noun and a modifier. When using the term as a modifier, the question becomes whether to use First Nation or First Nations. Note the different uses in the following examples.

- (*plural modifier, plural noun*) The number of First Nations students enrolled at Canadian universities and colleges has soared over the past 20 years.
- (*singular modifier, plural noun*) The association assists female First Nation entrepreneurs interested in starting home businesses.
- (*plural modifier, singular noun*) Containing recipes from across the country, the First Nations cookbook became an instant hit at church bazaars.
- (*singular modifier, singular noun*) Many people have said that *North of 60* and *The Rez* were the only shows on television that depicted life in a First Nation community with any realism.

There is no clear right or wrong in this area, provided that writers are consistent about the way they choose to use modifiers.

First Peoples

First Peoples is another collective term used to describe the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. It is used less frequently than terms like Aboriginal Peoples and Native Peoples. Some define it as including only the First Nations and Inuit, not Métis (which “Aboriginal Peoples” does include). If the term is used, it should be defined.

Some use lowercase peoples, but both words uppcased appears to be the dominant spelling.

Indian

The term Indian collectively describes all the Indigenous Peoples in Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. Indian Peoples are one of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal in the *Constitution Act* of 1982 along with Inuit and Métis. In addition, three categories apply to Indians in Canada: Status Indians, Non-Status Indians and Treaty Indians.

Status Indians – Status Indians are people who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained by the federal government. Certain criteria determine who can be registered as a Status Indian. Only Status Indians are recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act* and are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law.

Non-Status Indians – Non-Status Indians are people who consider themselves Indians or members of a First Nation but whom the Government of Canada does not recognize as Indians under the *Indian Act*, either because they are unable to prove their Indian status or have lost their status rights. Non-Status Indians are not entitled to the same rights and benefits available to Status Indians.

Treaty Indians – Treaty Indians are descendants of Indians who signed treaties with Canada and who have a contemporary connection with a treaty band.

The term Indian is considered outdated by many people, and there is much debate over whether to continue using this term. Use First Nation/s person instead of Indian, except in the following cases:

- in direct quotations
- when citing titles of books, works of art, etc.
- in discussions of history where necessary for clarity and accuracy
- in discussions of some legal/constitutional matters requiring precision in terminology
- in discussions of rights and benefits provided on the basis of Indian status
- in statistical information collected using these categories (e.g., the census)

The term is used as both a noun and a modifier.

Indigenous

Indigenous means “native to the area.” In this sense, Aboriginal Peoples are indeed indigenous to North America. Its meaning is similar to Aboriginal Peoples, Native Peoples or First Peoples.

The term usually refers to Aboriginal people internationally. It is gaining acceptance, particularly among some Aboriginal scholars to recognize the place of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada’s late-colonial era and implies land tenure. The term is also used by the United Nations in its working groups and in its Decade of the World’s Indigenous People. As a self-declared term (rather than government imposed), and because of its international connotation, it was the term chosen for the title of the IJIH.

Indigenous/indigenous – As a proper name for a people, or any aspect of their culture, the term is capitalized (e.g., Indigenous medicines); otherwise, it is lowercase.

Innu

Innu are the Naskapi and Montagnais First Nations Peoples who live in Quebec and Labrador. They are not to be confused with Inuit or Inuk.

Inuit

Inuit are a circumpolar people, inhabiting regions in Russia, Alaska, Canada and Greenland, united by a common culture and language. There are approximately 55,000 Inuit living in Canada. Inuit live primarily in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and northern parts of Quebec and coastal Labrador. They have traditionally lived for the most part north of the treeline in the area bordered by the Mackenzie Delta in the west, the Labrador coast in the east, the southern point of Hudson Bay in the south and the High Arctic islands in the north.

The Indian Act does not cover Inuit. However, in 1939, the Supreme Court of Canada interpreted the federal government's power to make laws affecting "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians" as extending to Inuit.

Inuk – Inuk is the singular form of Inuit. Use Inuk when referring to one person. When referring to two people, the correct term is Inuuk. For three or more people, it is Inuit.

Inuktitut – Inuit have a strong cultural identity, including usage of traditional languages. For example, 70 percent of Inuit can carry on a conversation in Inuktitut—the Inuit language. In the eastern Arctic and Nunavik, Inuktitut is the language people read, speak and use on a daily basis.

Languages spoken by Inuit comprise a number of dialects, some of which are not easily comprehensible by Inuit in other regions.

Written Inuktitut utilizes either a system of syllabics (called Qaniuyaapiat) or, in the western Arctic, the Kitikmeot region and Nunatsiavut, roman orthography (called Qaliuyaapait). The dialect of Inuktitut in the Inuvialuit region is called Inuvialuktun. In the Kitikmeot region, Inuinnaqtun is spoken.

The word Inuit means "the people" in Inuktitut and is the term by which Inuit refer to themselves. Avoid using the term "Inuit people" as it is redundant. The term Eskimo is considered derogatory and should not be used. In Alaska, Inuit are referred to as Alaska Natives.

Inuit is acceptable as both a noun and a modifier. According to the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the preferred use of Inuit as a noun is simply Inuit, not the Inuit.

X As hunters, the Inuit people led a seasonal existence, living according to nature's schedule.

√ As hunters, Inuit led a seasonal existence, living according to nature's schedule.

Communities and Settlements – Inuit live in communities and settlements. Inuit never lived on reserves, therefore the terms on-reserve and off-reserve do not apply to Inuit, only to First Nations. Wording that is supposed to cover all Aboriginal communities—for example, a reference to people living on a reserve, off a reserve or in urban areas—must add in Inuit communities in order to be inclusive of Inuit living in the North.

There are four Inuit comprehensive land claims regions covering more than one-third of Canada: the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik in northern Quebec, and Nunatsiavut in Labrador. Nunavut has three subregions—Kitikmeot, Kivalliq and Qikiqtaaluk—which are called regions. These are not referred to as Inuit Regions or Inuit Territories.

Métis

The word Métis is French for “mixed blood.” Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* of 1982 recognizes Métis as one of the three Aboriginal Peoples of Canada.

Historically, the term Métis applied to the children of French fur traders and Cree women in the Prairies; of English and Scottish traders and Dene women in the North; and of British and Inuit in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The name Métis, in Canada, is constitutionally applied to descendants of communities in what is now southern Manitoba along the Red River Valley and Winnipeg. The name has also been constitutionally applied to the descendants of similar communities in what are now Quebec and Labrador, although these groups’ histories are different from that of the western Métis, as well as a community of Métis in northeastern British Columbia on a settlement called Kelly Lake. There are also Métis settlements recognized by the Alberta government in the early 1900s through the Métis Settlement Act and independent of any other representatives of Métis People in Canada.

Today, the term is used broadly to describe people with mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis. Note that Métis organizations in Canada have differing criteria about who qualifies as a Métis person.

Accent or no accent? – Many people and groups, particularly in the west and the North, have dropped the accent in Métis. In keeping with the Métis National Council, our default position is to use the accent. Nevertheless, it is best to check the names of individual Métis organizations before you publish them.

Métis settlements – In 1938, the Alberta government set aside 1.25 million acres of land for eight Métis settlements; however, Métis never lived on reserves. Therefore the terms on-reserve and off-reserve do not apply to them, only to First Nations. Wording that is supposed to cover all Aboriginal communities—for example, a reference to people living on a reserve, off a reserve or in urban areas—must add Métis settlements to be inclusive.

Native

Native is a word similar in meaning to Aboriginal. Native Peoples is a collective term to describe the descendants of the original peoples of North America. The term is increasingly seen as outdated (particularly when used as a noun) and is starting to lose acceptance.

Native American

This commonly used term in the United States describes the descendants of the original peoples of North America. The term has not gained acceptance in Canada because of the apparent reference to U.S. citizenship. However, some Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have argued that because they are descendants of the original peoples of the Americas, the term Native American should apply to them regardless of their citizenship. Native North American has been used to identify the original peoples of Canada and the United States.

Reservation

A reservation is land set aside by the U.S. government for the use and occupation of a group of Native Americans. The term does not apply in Canada.

Reserve

A reserve is land set aside by the Crown for the use and benefit of a band in Canada. Many First Nations now prefer the term First Nation community and no longer use reserve.

Capitalize reserve only when used as part of a name; otherwise it should remain lowercase.

On-reserve/off-reserve: These terms are modifiers to qualify people or things that are or are not part of a reserve. Avoid moving the on-reserve/off-reserve modifier after the noun and removing the hyphen.

- X The government has announced a new approach to housing on reserve.
- X Businesses on reserve are eligible for the new training program.

Readers may have trouble interpreting these sentences. They are either grammatically incorrect or suggest that businesses and housing have been set aside for future use (i.e., they are in reserve).

- √ The government has announced a new approach to on-reserve housing. .
- √ On-reserve businesses are eligible for the new training program. .
- √ Businesses located on reserves are eligible for the new training program.

Another common usage that should be avoided is people who live on reserve and people who live off reserve:

- X Students who live on reserve are eligible for the summer employment program.
- X It can be a welcome place for First Nations people who live off reserve.
- √ Students living on a reserve are eligible for the summer employment program. .
- √ It can be a welcome place for First Nations people living off reserve.

Do not write “off-reserve Aboriginal people” as neither the Métis nor Inuit live on reserves.

Tribal Council

A tribal council is a group that is made up of several bands and that represents the interests of those bands. A tribal council may administer funds or deliver common services to those bands. Membership in a tribal council tends to be organized around geographic, political, treaty, cultural and/or linguistic lines.

Tribe

A tribe is a group of Native Americans sharing a common language and culture. The term is used frequently in the United States, but only in a few areas of Canada (e.g., the Blood Tribe in Alberta).