



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

Indigenous Protocols and Terms



Guidelines for a welcome to country

A Welcome to Country ceremony acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which you meet and shows respect for Aboriginal people as Australia's First Nation's Peoples. Ceremonies and protocols are a fundamental part of Aboriginal culture.

A traditional Welcome to Country is a speech, ceremony, song or combination of things that can only be done by a local Aboriginal Elder of the community of the area. The Welcome to Country always occurs at the opening of an event and is usually the first item on the program. It is held at major events and meetings and welcomes people to visit and meet on the traditional lands.

The traditional custodians are people who have originally come from that area and acknowledged by the community. They are people recognised by the Aboriginal community as a whole.

Event organisers may need to spend time talking with the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council to identify the appropriate custodians and ensure the relevance of their involvement in any type of public event.

In some areas of Western Australia there may be two or more language groups that have traditional custodianship of the land where the event is being held. In these circumstances, all groups should be approached and consulted regarding the Welcome to Country ceremony. In relation to Murdoch University (Murdoch campus), the land we are situated on is within Whadjuk boodja (Whadjuk country). For the Mandurah campus is Binjareb/Pinjareb boodja/country.

Who to ask

The Welcome to Country is a right of the local traditional custodian and not a privilege: it is not about political correctness or tokenism.

Contact the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council prior to any planned event if you are unsure of the required format for the ceremony/event. Observing Aboriginal protocol includes allowing time for traditional decision-making and discussion among traditional custodians.

Not all Aboriginal people can perform a Welcome to Country as it must be given by an appropriate person such as a recognised Elder within the local community.

It is necessary for the speaker who follows immediately after the Welcome to Country ceremony to provide a response. The following text can be used in response to the traditional Welcome to Country:

I respectfully acknowledge Elders past and present and the traditional custodians of this land on which we are meeting, the (appropriate group) people. It is a privilege to be standing on (appropriate group) country.

Guidelines for Acknowledgment of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way that non-Aboriginal people can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and the ongoing relationship and connection of traditional owners with the land. An Acknowledgement of Country may also be done at smaller, less formal gatherings. An acknowledgement, for example, would be appropriate at the commencing lecture of any unit taught at the University.

A lecturer, chair or speaker begins the meeting by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the country of the traditional owners.

An Acknowledgement of Country statement can be:

I acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people.

I acknowledge that this meeting is being held on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people on this land.

I acknowledge that this meeting is being held on (appropriate group) land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people on this land.

I acknowledge that we are on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar and pay respect to all Noongar people and elders, both past and present.

Acknowledgement of Country is a way that the wider community can demonstrate respect for Aboriginal protocols and can be performed by an individual, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal person, participating in many situations. The Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre encourages all academic staff to Acknowledge the Country on which they teach as part of their professional practice and commitment to reconciliation.

The Centre for University Teaching and Learning has developed downloadable content to be added to lectures and other forms of presentation used at Murdoch University

Appropriate terminology

This information is not just about 'correct' and 'incorrect' language, it is also about knowing the power of the language you use in a University setting.

It recognises that English, as the dominant language in Australia, is a vehicle for the expression of discrimination and prejudice, as cultural values and attitudes are reflected in the structures and meanings of the language we use. This means that language cannot be regarded as a neutral or unproblematic medium and can cause or reflect discrimination and disrespect due to its intricate links with society and culture. When using language in a university context, it is always important to understand its historical context and the ways in which it informs discourses of power.



Appropriate terminology for naming and representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, societies and histories

The recognition and appropriate representation of Indigenous Australians is fundamental to social justice. It is important that the appropriate descriptors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be capitalised as this conveys respect. In addition, the 'more appropriate' terms will stress the humanity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The use of terms that stereotype and homogeny fail to recognise the social, linguistic and cultural diversity of Indigenous Australia. Australia, before the invasion, was comprised of nations of language groups that represented between 200-300 autonomous languages.

- Language Names: Colonisation has seen the renaming of peoples, places and natural features all over Australia. For example, the word 'Aboriginal' is an imposed name. Aboriginal language terms for Aboriginal peoples such as 'Koori', 'Murri', 'Noongar' are appropriate for areas where these language terms apply. Local names identify language groups and communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for example 'Gamilaray' (NSW) or 'Pitjantjatjara' (SA). Use the most appropriate term when known and when you do not know consult with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, use 'Uluru' (Pitjantjatjara) instead of 'Ayers Rock'.

Identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Official government identification determines that Indigenous Australian people are people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and are accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in the community in which they live, or have lived (AIATSIS, 2012). Note that this official identification is not always satisfactory for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cannot be satisfactory for many members of the Stolen Generations who may not be able to demonstrate connection to a 'community' and therefore acceptance by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of that community.

It is also important to note that identification as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person is not determined by skin colour or tone.

Appropriate Acknowledgment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in writing

Written assessments (e.g. assignments, Power Point presentations for seminars etc.) needs to be respectful of the appropriate terminology when making reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. With this in mind, the use of pronouns such as 'the', 'they', 'them', 'these', 'their' and 'those' cannot be used as substitutes. The use of these pronouns is a writing practice that objectifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and creates a social distance between you as a student and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, societies and histories. In your research you will encounter texts that use inappropriate language, naming and styles of representation. The terms 'we' and 'us' also need to be interrogated within essays. Ensure you are aware of who is included and excluded within these collective terms. It may be necessary at times in essays to quote material that uses inappropriate and offensive representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The use of quotes of this nature is acceptable but it is important that these representations are noted within a historical context and are critiqued appropriately.

Historic and current classification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

In the past, Australian governments classified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples according to skin colour and parentage using inappropriate terms. The assumption was that any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person with any 'European' blood was more intelligent and therefore acceptable as a member of Australian society. Less appropriate terms create false divisions between Indigenous Australian peoples of different areas. It is critical that these terms are not used to refer to or to attempt to classify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Use of terms such as 'half-caste', 'quarter-caste', 'full-blood' are not appropriate and have historically been used to oppress Aboriginal peoples according to a racialised system of blood quantum. At the heart of the continued practice of classifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the issue of 'authenticity' – the idea that the 'real' Aboriginal people live in remote areas like Arnhem Land or the Central Desert and that only 'traditional' Aboriginal peoples and cultures are 'really Aboriginal'. Caution should be used with terms such as 'rural', 'isolated' and 'remote'. These words should refer to geographical location and access to services only. It is important to recognise that Indigenous Australian peoples have much more in common than the wide use of classificatory terms such as 'urban' and 'traditional' would suggest. For example, many Aboriginal people who are classified as 'urban' have close links to 'traditional' country



Representing social and cultural practices

Historical studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples using anthropological terms such as 'band', 'clan' and 'tribe' to convey characteristics of social groupings are inappropriate.

- The less appropriate terms imply Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies are not as 'advanced' as European societies. The terms are based on the 'progress' model (from 'lower' to 'higher' (Western) forms of social organisation) of history grounded in the ideas of evolutionary science.

Representing governance structures

Elders are women and men in Aboriginal communities who are respected for wisdom and knowledge of culture and law. Female and male Elders have higher levels of knowledge for the maintenance of cultural, historical and social order.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not, and do not have chiefs, kings and queens. The introduction of 'kings' or 'queens' was a colonial strategy to raise up individuals for the authorities to deal with and create hierarchies similar to those found in colonial culture. Colonial governments imposed foreign governance structures on Indigenous Australian societies. It was a way of honouring individual status, but there was usually an element of mockery e.g. In such names as 'King Billy' or 'Queen Gooseberry'.

Representing belief systems

Popular use of the term 'Dreamtime' to refer to the period of creation is inappropriate in some communities. In terms of Indigenous belief systems, 'spirituality' or 'spiritual beliefs' is more appropriate. Indigenous Australian spirituality is localised by definition and is a way of life; connectedness and belonging. It is important to recognise that many Indigenous people are religious in terms of mainstream religions and often combine these beliefs with Indigenous spirituality. The Dreaming is often referred to in Aboriginal languages specific to particular areas of country, terms such as 'Tjuku' and 'Wapa' for example in Pitjantjatjara refer to the 'Dreaming'. For Noongar people what is often mistakenly referred to as 'Dreaming' is known as the 'nyitting' (cold times).

Representing land usage

The rotational or cyclical occupation of land by Aboriginal peoples was inaccurately portrayed as being 'nomadic' rather than the expression of an intimate knowledge of and ability to harvest the land. It was and is based on not staying in one place and exhausting all resources but moving around the territory at particular times when food resources became available. The crucial concept is 'belonging to the land'. It is offensive to Aboriginal peoples to refer to terms such as 'hunter-gatherer,' 'nomadic' and 'walkabout'.

- Nomadism has been associated with lack of land tenure or anchorage in land and this has been coupled with the idea that Aboriginal peoples did not really occupy the land but only roamed over it. The extension of the 'doctrine of terra nullius' was based on this kind of distinction. Issues of land, rights to land and land ownership remains 'unsettled business' for the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Representing history

'Pre-history' is a term used by some archaeologists and historians to denote the time period before European recorded history. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a long and valid history prior to the invasion. A history that tells Australia was founded in 1770 or 1788 denies a respectful place for Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were in Australia long before Captain Cook arrived hence it was impossible for Cook to be the first person to 'discover' Australia. The use of the word 'discovery' is not value-neutral and works to discount and disregard Indigenous knowledge systems.

- It is important to remember that Australia was not settled peacefully, it was invaded, occupied and colonised. The flow-on effects of these processes need to be recognised in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in the present. The information on Indigenous Protocols was adapted from Curtin University's CDIP Toolkit by Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre, Murdoch University. All information contained in Murdoch's Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice toolkit is based on material provided by Flinders University at in accordance with our Licence Agreement of 24 September 2009.

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