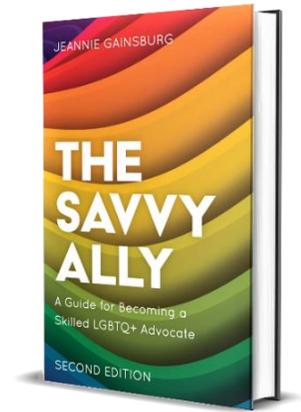# LGBTQ+ Etiquette and Common Bloopers

Sections of this handout were taken from *The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate* (2nd edition)

A Few Great Terms to Know

Ally: A person who is not a part of a particular marginalized group but who stands up and advocates for the rights of people in that group. Being an ally isn't just for straight/cisgender people. LGBTQ+ people can also be allies to others within the community, for example, a white transgender man can be an ally to transgender women of color.

Cisgender: Relating to an individual whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth; someone who is not transgender. Cisgender is a norm-busting word that helps avoid thinking and speaking about one group of people (in this case cisgender folks) as normal and another group (in this case trans folks) as deviant.

LGBTQ+: One of the many initialisms created to refer to all sexual and gender minorities. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, plus so much more! You're likely to see lots of variations of the initialism. There's no *correct* one. Keep an eye on which initialism community members are using in your area and use that one.

Common LGBTQ+ Language Bloopers*

Using the Outdated Term *Homosexual* Instead of *Gay*
Until 1973, *homosexuality* was considered a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. Because of this the word *homosexual* holds negative connotations for many people. Use *gay* instead.

Saying *Sexual Preference* Instead of *Sexual Orientation*
Avoid the word *preference* when talking about whom people are attracted to. The word *preference* implies that someone's attraction is a choice rather than a part of who they are. Use *orientation* instead.

Referring to the *Gay Lifestyle*
Living with fifteen cats is a lifestyle. Being LGBTQ+ is not. It's just who someone is. Avoid the word *lifestyle* in the context of LGBTQ+ people and lives. There is no gay lifestyle, just as there is no straight lifestyle.

Getting Creative with the Word *Transgender*

The words *transgender* and its shortened version, *trans,* are adjectives: descriptive words that describe a noun. The same is true for the words *gay* and *queer*, but the words *transgender* and *trans* seem to get misused the most. A transgender is incorrect. A transgender man is correct.

Asking About Someone's *Preferred* Pronoun

Asking for someone's *preferred* pronoun implies that the person is fond of a specific pronoun but that any pronoun will do, when typically this is not the case. Remove the word *preferred* and simply refer to people's pronouns.

Using Old Names and Pronouns

For many transgender individuals, the time before they transitioned was a painful one when they were forced to express themselves in a way that felt wrong. Using an old name or pronoun for a transgender person may remind them of a very unhappy time. Referring to them using old names and pronouns can also out them to others. Not only is this disrespectful, but it may also be a confidentiality issue and a safety concern. Always use the person's current name and pronouns, even when referring to them in the past. For example, even though we know actor Elliot Page was not using his current name and pronoun in 2007, he filmed the movie *Juno*, the correct way to talk about him is to say, "Elliot Page was so great in the movie *Juno*. He is such a good actor."

Respectful Communication Tips

Ungender Your Language and Expectations

If you don't know anything about someone or their loved ones, using ungendered language is a great way to be welcoming and inclusive to everyone. Use *spouse* or *partner* instead of *husband* or *wife*. Use *students* instead of *boys and girls.* Use *distinguished guests* instead of *ladies and gentlemen.* Ready to replace *guys*? Try using *folks*, *friends*, *team*, *crew, colleagues*, *everyone,* and (if you can pull it off) *y'all*.

Mirror Terms

Respectfully mirror the terms that people use for themselves and their loved ones. If a coworker tells you that she saw a great movie with her wife, then you have just received valuable information for being respectful to her. You should now switch from your previous ungendered term of *partner* to *wife*.

Implement the "Switch It" Technique as Needed

When hurtful LGBTQ+ comments or microaggressions are switched and readdressed to straight/cisgender people, it often becomes clearer why they're offensive. If you hear someone asking an LGTBQ+ community member an inappropriate question, the "switch it" technique can be helpful to explain to them why the question was hurtful. For example, would we ever ask a straight woman how she knows she's straight if she's never slept with a woman?

Focus on What You Need to Know
You don't need to how your coworkers or students identify, whom they're attracted to, or what sex they were assigned at birth (and you shouldn't be asking). The only thing you need to know is how to respectfully refer to them. The best way to learn how to refer to a person (i.e., correct names and pronouns) is to offer everyone an opportunity to share that information if they'd like to. Some ways to do this are as follows:

1) Whenever a new person joins your team, invite folks to share not only their name, but their pronouns, too.
2) Include pronouns and how people would like to be addressed on your staff list and update it regularly.
3) Add an optional section to your forms, where respondents can indicate their pronouns.
4) Make it a standard policy to ask employees if they'd like their pronouns included on their name tags, ID badges, name plates, or business cards.
5) Place a bowl of free pronoun stickers or pins at the entrance to your buildings and where people check in at your events.
6) If you're a teacher, include an optional section for pronouns on your Getting to Know You forms.

Messing Up Properly

Apologize
If you've just messed up someone's name or pronoun, the best way to apologize is to imagine that you bumped into the person on the street. Just offer a simple, "Excuse me" or "I'm sorry." Try not to over apologize, as this draws a lot of attention to your blunder *and* to the person you messed up with. Simply saying, "Thank you" after someone corrects you, is also a good response. This way you're not forcing the person you misgendered into a situation where they feel like they have to say, "It's okay."

Forgive Yourself
Being an ally is an ongoing journey of messing up. Forgive yourself and put in the work to get it right the next time.

Get It Right the Next Time
If you're trying to remember to use a new name, pronoun, or word, you must make a conscious effort to retain the information or you'll lose it. Try writing the information down somewhere you'll see it often, adding pronouns to your phone contacts, or using real world reminders, like all-gender restrooms, to practice.

* By "blooper" I mean an embarrassing error, not a funny mistake. It's not my intention to diminish the impact of LGBTQ+ faux pas and derogatory terms.