

KSHB Descriptors Style Guidelines

The descriptors committee has worked to create a resource that reporters, producers and others in the newsroom can reference when covering stories in certain communities.

Descriptors can mean many things. We should only use descriptors – whether they are professions, ideologies, geographies, gender, race and beyond – when they are relevant. But our focus here is largely on race and gender identity. Our goal is to help our newsroom more effectively, consistently and considerately cover stories from all communities in our city and surrounding areas.

To do so, we've determined the following guidelines.

We will follow Associated Press style the majority of the time. Each department within the newsroom will have a subscription to the online version of the AP Stylebook, so we are always referencing the most current information (and not a stylebook from 2005, for example).

We will reference the following guides when covering a subject that focuses on a specific community.

[National Association of Black Journalists Style Guide](#)

[National Association of Hispanic Journalists Cultural Competence Guide](#)

[Asian American Journalists Association Guide to Covering Asian America](#)

[Movement Advancement Project LGBTQIA Ally Guide of Terminology](#)

[RTDNA's Diversity Style Guide](#)

If the style in one of these handbooks differs from AP style, we'll have a conversation with managers about which source we will use. When we differ from AP style on a specific story or subject, managers will disseminate that information to the rest of the newsroom, including how we arrived at that conclusion.

The differentiation request should also be sent to descriptors@kshb.com for the committee to review.

The committee will hold quarterly meetings to review the AP style differentiation requests, which will be collected into our own ever-evolving style guide.

The committee will create a shared Google document to begin building a localized style guide. For example, KSHB capitalizes the "B" in Black when referring to people or culture.

This shared document will be accessible to everyone on the staff at all times, but only committee members will have editing capabilities.

Updates to the style guide will be reviewed by the EDI Committee and then disseminated to the entire staff following the committee's review process.

When to use descriptors

Before using race as a descriptor, **carefully consider whether it is necessary and adds value to the story**. Here are some questions from RTDNA to ask yourself:

- Is this person's race relevant?
- Have I explained the relevance?
- Is it free of codes and implications? From RTDNA: "Be careful not to use welfare, inner-city, underprivileged, blue collar, conservative, suburban, exotic, middle-class, Uptown, South Side or wealthy as euphemisms for racial groups. By definition, the White House is in the inner-city. Say what you mean."
- Are racial identifiers used equally?
- **Should I consult someone of another race or ethnicity?**

Race alone does not relate enough context. It can't be the first, second, third or even fourth descriptor. Just because police include race in their description does not mean we need to include it. Race should be far from the primary qualifier but can still be important when police are searching for a missing person or a suspect. If there is an urgent public safety concern (i.e. Amber Alert, active shooter) that requires us to temporarily consider bypassing this policy, a manager will send out guidance.

When you decide to use race as a descriptor, you must first have at least five other traits.

Check the quality of your descriptors. They should be specific enough that they would help identify someone.

Avoid vague or generic descriptors.

To Consider

Speed and deadline pressure should not be a factor when writing descriptions. Take a moment to think about what you're writing.

If your description describes five to six people in the newsroom, reconsider.

Make sure your description includes the most up-to-date information.

If you have further questions on whether or not it's OK to use race as a descriptor, check the [RTDNA Guidelines for Racial Identification](#), the [AP Stylebook's guidelines for race-related coverage](#) and consult a manager.

Conversation is key in this strategy — and many of the conversations will be hard. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your sources, your colleagues and your managers. Discussion will help us arrive at the best conclusion in the end. Asking is always better than assuming.

If a description that doesn't meet these standards makes it online or into a newscast, a manager will follow up with the content creator. Following the meeting, the manager will send further guidance to the newsroom reminding everybody of the policy.

If you know of other guides we should consider including, please email Matt.

The descriptors committee will do quarterly spot-checks of newscasts and digital content to ensure we are following these guidelines.