

Concept Cheatsheet: Language

Intent-Impact gap

The space between the effect a messenger wants their message to achieve and the impact it has on the receiver.

Sign

The combination of a signifier (i.e. the word "tree") and the signified, or what it's meant to represent (i.e. the plant with a trunk and branches).

Relational/Differential

Words find their meanings in relation to other words and in the differences between those definitions.

Semiotic triangle

A graphic representation of a sign, including the signifier, the signified (the literal thing being represented) and its related concept.

Encoding/Decoding

The process of producing and sending a message (encoding) and the receiving and interpretation of that message (decoding).

Coded language

Terms understood to have ulterior meanings or connotations, particularly within in-groups.

Opportunity cost

The difference in impact between the option you choose and the best option you pass up. In economics, the impact is literal cost.

Self-description

Empowering others by encouraging and utilizing their descriptions of their personal identities and lived experiences.

People-first language

Terms that emphasize the humanity in an individual or group of people, instead of defining them by a trait or experience.

Sensitivity reader

Editors who give special attention to how historically oppressed people are represented in media with the goal of eliminating bias.