

Religious Terminology

According to the Pew Research Center, “Worldwide, more than eight in ten people identify with a religious group” (“The Global Religious Landscape”). It is important to remember that statistic when and if you choose a topic or write a paper on or including religious contexts. You should do so mindfully since writing is powerful, and we can use it to uplift and educate others.

Relevance and Inclusivity

First, ask yourself whether or not it is essential or relevant to talk about religion in the context in which you are writing (“Religion by Country”). It can be a delicate subject, and the writer should carefully consider if a person’s religion needs to be mentioned at all. If you do decide it is relevant, you want to make your writing *inclusive*. Inclusive writing is “accessible and welcoming to everyone. It avoids using words, expressions, or assumptions that could exclude or offend anyone” (“Inclusive Writing Guide”).

According to the World Population Review, the total estimated population (from 2020) for each religion is listed below.

- Christianity - 2.38 billion
- Islam - 1.91 billion
- Hinduism - 1.16 billion
- Buddhism - 507 million
- Folk Religions - 430 million
- Other Religions - 61 million
- Judaism - 14.6 million
- Unaffiliated - 1.19 billion

NOTE: This handout is not exhaustive and focuses on religions with larger populations.

Religious Terms

- Christianity:
 - Christian - noun
 - a person who has received Christian baptism or is a believer in Christianity.
 - Ex: My cousin is Christian, and he likes to hike.
 - Catholic - noun
 - a member of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - Ex: My brother is Catholic, and he enjoys drawing.

- Catholic - adjective
 - of the Roman Catholic faith/of or including all Christians.
 - Ex: It was interesting to see how they uphold their Catholic principles.
- **Islam:**
 - Muslim - noun
 - a follower of the religion of Islam.
 - Ex: My sister is Muslim, and she loves chocolate.
- **Hinduism:**
 - Hindu - noun
 - a follower of Hinduism.
 - Ex: Many Hindus travel a long way to see the Ganges or to wash in its waters. ([Cambridge Dictionary](#))
- **Buddhism:**
 - Buddhist - noun
 - an adherent of the religion based on the teachings of Buddha.
 - Ex: He is Buddhist and rides his bike on the weekends.
 - Buddhist - adjective
 - relating to the religion based on the teachings of Buddha.
 - Ex: I have only seen that Buddhist custom once before.
- **Other Religions, Including Confucianism and Taoism:**
 - Confucian - noun
 - an adherent of Confucianism.
 - Ex: The Confucian had high ethical standards for himself.
 - Confucian - adjective
 - relating to Confucius or Confucianism.
 - Ex: In the Confucian spirit, he was the respected elder.
 - Taoist - noun
 - an adherent of the Chinese philosophy of Taoism.
 - Ex: The Taoist on the balcony peered over the city.
 - Taoist - adjective
 - relating to the Chinese philosophy of Taoism.
 - Ex: He wore Taoist clothing.

- **Judaism:**
 - Jew - noun
 - a member of the people and cultural community whose traditional religion is Judaism and who trace their origins through the ancient Hebrew people of Israel to Abraham.
 - Ex: Noah is a practicing Orthodox Jew.
 - Jewish - adjective
 - relating to, associated with, or denoting Jewish people or Judaism.
 - Ex: I have never observed a Jewish holiday before.
- **Atheism:**
 - Atheist - noun
 - a person who disbelieves or lacks belief in the existence of God or gods.
 - Ex: Linda is a committed atheist.

General Resources

The following websites provide more information about religions and inclusive language/terminology.

- [Inclusive Writing: Religion, Faith and Belief](#)
- [Religion By Country](#)
- [Examples of What to Avoid When Using Religious Language](#)
- [General Inclusive Language Guide](#)
- [Differences Between Catholicism and Christianity](#)

Also be sure to check out other [cultural and/or religious clubs](#) on our San José State University campus.

Activity 1: Relevance

Using the information provided in this handout, choose the correct answer to each multiple-choice question.

1. If I am unsure whether or not I should include religious terminology in my writing, I should
 - a. do more research on my topic or context for writing.
 - b. include it because more information is always better.
 - c. consider how to make it inclusive.
 - d. both a and c.
2. Why can writing about other religions be important?
 - a. Around every 8 out of 10 people in the world are religious.
 - b. It can help educate people about things they do not know.
 - c. We should not write about it at all because it could hurt someone's feelings.
 - d. both a and b.

Answer Key for Activity 1: Relevance

1. d. both a and c - Only include religious terminology if it is relevant to the context of your writing. When including it, do so carefully and mindfully to educate and uplift others.
2. d. both a and b - Most people in the world practice or follow a religion. It is important to recognize that and the fact that others may not know what religions exist around the world. As long as you use the power of writing (or any form of communication for that matter) when talking about them without the intention of harming and are inclusive, it can be very important.

Activity 2: Applying Religious Terminology

Using the information provided in this handout, choose the correct answer to each multiple-choice question.

1. Maria practices Christianity; she is _____.
 - a. Muslim
 - b. a Jew
 - c. Christian
 - d. Hindu
2. Laila is practicing Islam; she is _____.
 - a. Buddhist
 - b. Hindu
 - c. a Jew
 - d. Muslim
3. Andy is practicing Hinduism; he is _____.
 - a. Buddhist
 - b. Hindu
 - c. Muslim
 - d. Jewish
4. Jonathan is Buddhist which means he practices _____.
 - a. Islam
 - b. Judaism
 - c. Hinduism
 - d. Buddhism
5. Arthur is Confucian which means he practices _____.
 - a. Taoism
 - b. Islam
 - c. Confucianism
 - d. Hinduism
6. Noah practices Judaism which means she is _____.
 - a. a Jew
 - b. Muslim
 - c. Buddhist
 - d. Taoist

Answer Key for Activity 2: Applying Religious Terminology

1. c. Christian - someone who practices Christianity can be Christian or Catholic. *NOTE: All Catholics are Christians, but not all Christians are Catholics* ([Diffen](#)).
2. d. Muslim - someone who practices Islam is known as a Muslim.
3. b. Hindu - someone who practices Hinduism is known as a Hindu.
4. d. Buddhism - someone who is Buddhist practices Buddhism.
5. c. Confucianism - someone who is Confucian practices Confucianism.
6. a. a Jew - someone who practices Judaism is known as a Jew.

References

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