

# Communication

Context and Meaning



# Presenter

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# Agenda

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Words and How we Use Them

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Words with Impact - Place Names

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Bias in Collections Data - Things to Consider

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Disclaimers, Warnings and Labels

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# Learning Objectives

- Engage in exercises to determine the need for developing shared understandings when using words across contexts.
- Explore the concept of toponomastics and be able to critically consider the way in which we interpret place-names through key factors such as our own perceptions, biases, and social and academic contexts.
- Consider the processes for communicating information in the form of disclaimers, warnings, and labels.

# First a disclaimer...

If you take away only one thing? It's this.



It is presumed that all issues of copyright and access around the specimens, items and researcher's archives have been taken care of. You should know whether or not your institution has clear title to what it has in its possession and if there is doubt that should be investigated before sharing or making data/information available.

# Words and How we Use Them

# Context Alters Meaning



“

Words in and of themselves are impotent[...] It is the socially structured practices and historically situated circumstances constituting our social lives that pour content into words, endow them with meaning and power. ” [Sally McConnell-Ginet](#)

“Words are woven into the social fabric...”

# Words and How We Use Them

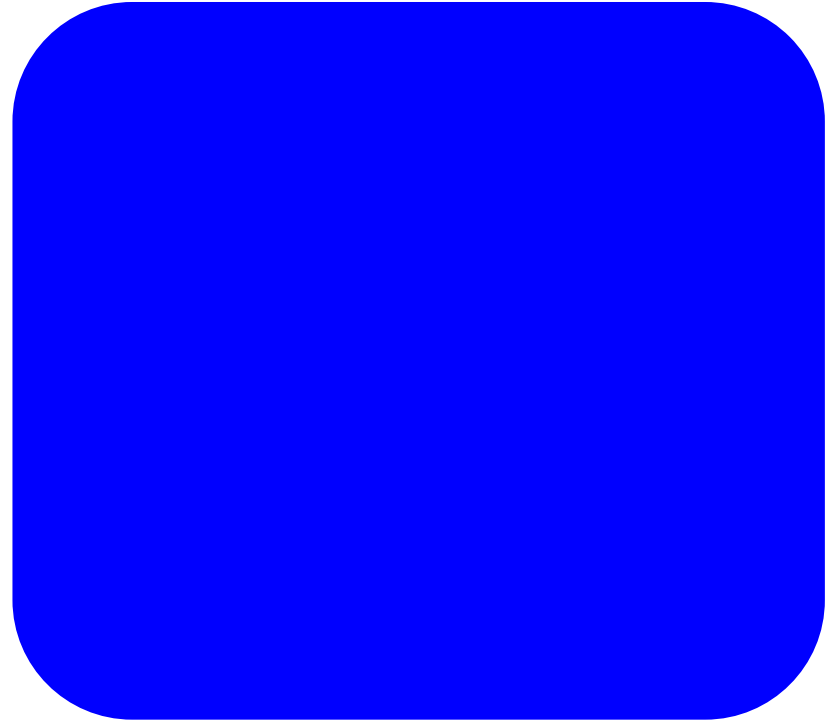


How does context affect meaning?

## Exercise 1a: blue

What comes to mind when you think about blue?

1. In the group chat tell us what comes to mind when you think about this.



# Words and How We Use Them



How does context affect meaning?

## Exercise 1a: blue

**Denotation:** dictionary definition

“*Blue*. The hue of that portion of the visible spectrum lying between green and indigo, evoked in the human observer by radiant energy with wavelengths of approximately 420 to 490 nanometers; any of a group of colors that may vary in lightness and saturation, whose hue is that of a clear daytime sky; one of the additive or light primaries; one of the psychological primary hues.”



**Connotations:** associated or implied meanings

- Melancholy, depressing.
- Learned, intellectual
- Profane, Indecent, risque
- Tending to support [US] democratic candidates or policies;
- Corporate

# Words and How We Use Them



How does context affect meaning?

## Exercise 1b: evolution

**Denotation:** dictionary definition

*“Biology.* change in the gene pool of a population from generation to generation by such processes as mutation, natural selection, and genetic drift.”

**Connotations:** associated or implied meanings

- The use of the term evolution often implies an inevitable/inexorable path of progress - being better than before. This links to the use of evolution in social arguments. Ultimately it can ‘naturalize’ certain outcomes both in society and nature.
- In a technical/scientific context, speaking strictly/formally about ‘evolution’ has a variety of underlying assumptions that may be entirely absent when speaking about it to broader public audiences or even to different academic/specialist groups.
- Darwin
- Social Darwinism.
- ?

# Words and How You Use Them.



Collate and document the definitions for a word or phrase from your work or area of expertise. How have they changed over time or between disciplines?



Examples of words from the biodiversity world could be: Diversity, Community, Science, Pipeline

1. Who defined the term first and when?
2. What differences did you find between definitions?
3. Did any definitions surprise you? Why?
4. Did you find definitions from outside of the domain?
5. Have the definitions changed over time?

**DISCUSS!**

# Choosing the Right Words

Speaking and communicating

1. What concepts describe the object in the picture?
2. What objects do we know that have the qualities we listed?
3. Which of those is most likely to be the object in the picture?



# Choosing the Right Words.



How do we decide what something is?

## Exercise 2

Describe the picture

1. Select words that describe the qualities of the object in the picture?
2. What objects do we know of that have the same qualities as those we listed?
3. Do you have enough information in step 1) to select the correct option from step 2)?



# Choosing the Right Words.



Try it!

How do we decide what something is?

## Exercise 2

Describe the picture

1. Did Group One identify the thing that Group Two was describing?



# Choosing the Right Words.



Try it!

How did we decide that this was an apple

## Exercise 2

Describing the apple without using the word apple.

1. Select words that describe the qualities of the object in the picture?
2. What objects do we know of that have the same qualities as those we listed?
3. Do you have enough information in step 1) to select the correct option from step 2)?



# Choosing the Right Words.



Try it!

How did we decide that this was an apple

## Exercise 2 - alternate

Describing the apple without using the word apple.

1. Select words that describe the qualities of the object in the picture?
2. What objects do we know of that have the same qualities as those we listed?
3. Do you have enough information in step 1) to select the correct option from step 2)?





## Discuss

An example from the mathematical domain is “fewer v less”.

1. What makes the choosing the wrong term a “pet peeve”?
2. Do others share the same feeling towards the term?



IMLS Symposium: <https://mm.fieldmuseum.org/f1fe1735-3b2e-4917-a59b-b200479ba5ea>

# Words With Impact - Place Names



# The study of place names.



Toponomastics is a taxonomic study of place-names (toponyms) based on etymological, historical and geographical information. A place-name is a word or words used to indicate, denote, or identify a geographic locality such as a town, river, or mountain.”

“Toponomastics divides place-names into 2 broad categories: habitation names and feature names.”

# Place Names (fictitious)



What can you tell about the place from the name?

## Exercise 3.1

Vulcan is the homeland of the Star Trek characters Spock, T'Pol, Saavik and Tuvok.

1. Without doing any research what can you say about this place?

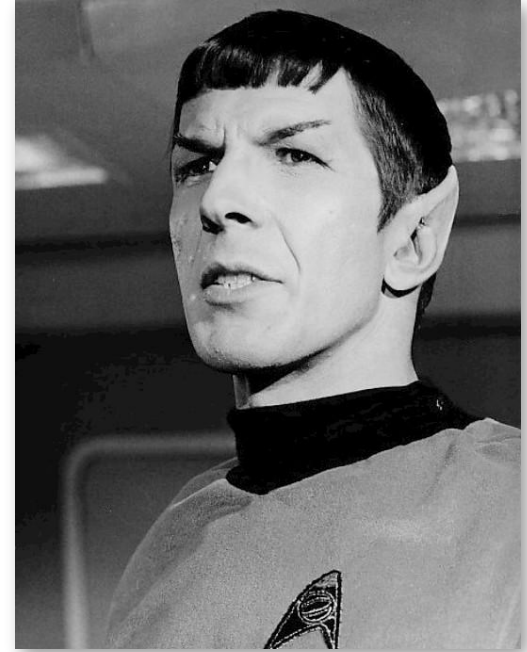


image: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Leonard\\_Nimoy\\_Spock\\_1967.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Leonard_Nimoy_Spock_1967.jpg)

# Place Names (real)



What can you tell about the place from the name?

## Exercise 3.2

Manchester is a city in the north of England. Important people from Manchester include Ian McKellen, J.K Rowling, Benedict Cumberbatch and Louise daCocodia.

1. Without doing any research what can you say about the place?
2. After doing some research what can you say about the place.
3. Compare before you did your research and the facts that you found out afterwards.





## Discuss

Select a place (habitation or feature) and use the internet to discover the origins of the name.

1. Was the place named because of the way it looks or after a person or people?
2. Are there different names in different languages?.
3. How long has the place had a name?
4. Has the placename changed over time and why did it change?



*IMLS Symposium: <https://mm.fieldmuseum.org/f1fe1735-3b2e-4917-a59b-b200479ba5ea>*

# Bias in Collections Data - Things to Consider

# Bias in Collections Data

Things to consider

- The data
  - How might bias manifest in data, information, and statistics?
- The people
  - What categories of people are involved in the creation of collections data?
- The system
  - How does “authority” impact future research and data?

# Bias in the Data

## How might bias manifest in data, information, and statistics?

- Sources consulted when compiling data
- Data and information included or excluded
- Data and information emphasised and considered significant
- Limitations or biases in funding, staff, or access to materials and information

## When evaluating a source, consider:

- Who compiled and presented the data?
- Where? Is there a specific audience or potential cultural frame used?
- When? Is there outdated information or historical prejudices?
- Why? Does the source have a goal that must be taken into account?
- How? Does the format imply bias?

# Understanding the People

## Four (potential) categories of people involved in data:

1. Those creating/working with the data/images
2. Those receiving/learning from the data/images
3. Those impacted by the data/images
4. (If the data is about people) Those being researched in the data

Category 3 and 4 almost always overlap, although category 3 can overlap with any category.

## When evaluating a source, consider:

- Are the researchers removed from the community, culture, issue, or phenomenon they're researching?
- If so, how does that impact their perspective?
- Do the people, communities, or cultures being researched or impacted by the research have a voice in the data?
- How does that impact the perspective of the research?

# Authority and Feedback Loops

## How does “authority” impact future research and data?

- Reliance on trusted sources as starting points for new research
- An incorrect or prejudiced starting source can lead to more incorrect or prejudiced research

## When evaluating a source, consider:

- Questions of source bias
- How is it perceived by other researchers with from a similar background?
- How is it perceived by researchers from different backgrounds or perspectives?
- What do these perspectives suggest about the source?

# Disclaimers, Warnings and Labels.

(c)

# Types of Disclaimer

Does one size fit all?

1. Types of Disclaimer
2. Types of Warning
3. Types of Label

- Copyright
- Confidentiality
- Liability
- Fair Use
- Investment
- Warranty
- Expression
- Guarantee

If you run a website, a legal disclaimer is a notice that is related to your website's content. It allows you inform people about your website's content, and it legally protects you from getting exposed to legal issues.

<http://www.linfo.org/database.html>

<https://www.passivetactics.com/what-is-a-disclaimer-8-types-you-need-to-know>

# Disclaimer or Terms and Conditions?



A disclaimer is a defensive measure. Usually, it's purpose is to protect people or companies from unwanted liability or legal claims.”



Terms and conditions include topics such as legally establishing usage and the structure of a legal relationship between website users and website owner”

# Warnings

Does one size fit all?

1. Types of Disclaimer
2. Types of Warning
3. Types of Label

- Content Warnings
- Trigger Warnings

**It is important that individuals know what to expect and that they are put in a position where they can act in their own best interest without ridicule or scrutiny.**

# What are content warnings?



Content warnings are verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive content. These notices flag the contents of the material that follows, so readers, listeners, or viewers can prepare themselves to adequately engage or, if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing.”

# Categories of Content Warning

Does one size fit all?

1. Types of Disclaimer
2. Types of Warning
3. Types of Label

- Abuse
- Animal cruelty or animal death
- Child abuse/pedophilia/incest
- Blood
- Classism
- Death or dying
- Eating disorders, body hatred, and fat phobia
- Hateful language direct at religious groups (e.g., Islamophobia, anti-Semitism)
- Homophobia and heterosexism

- Homophobia and heterosexism
- Kidnapping and abduction
- Miscarriages/abortion
- Mental illness and ableism
- Pornographic content
- Pregnancy/childbirth
- Racism and racial slurs
- Self-harm and suicide
- Sexism and misogyny
- Sexual assault
- Transphobia and trans-misogyny
- Violence

**This list is NOT  
exhaustive.**

# What is a Trigger Warning?



Are a specific variety of content warnings that attempt to forewarn audiences of content that may cause intense physiological and psychological symptoms for people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders.

# Disclaimers, Terms & Conditions and Warnings...



Can you find the pages on your institutions website that cover legal disclaimers, terms & conditions and warnings?

## Exercise 4

When you have found yours, try to find those of a sister institution.

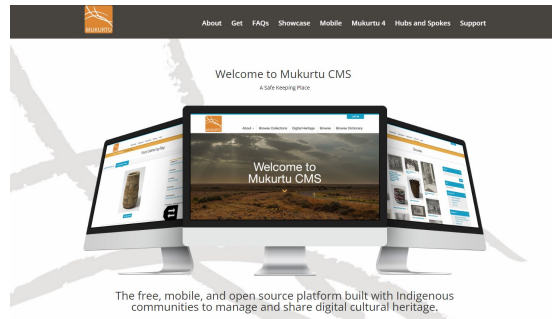
1. What is similar?
2. What is different?



image: <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/230000/velka/safety-warning.jpg>

# Types of Label

## Initiatives in the cultural data space



## Mukurtu <https://mukurtu.org/>

Mukurtu (MOOK-oo-too) is a grassroots project aiming to empower communities to manage, share, and exchange their digital heritage in culturally relevant and ethically-minded ways.

We are committed to maintaining an open, community-driven approach to Mukurtu's continued development. Our first priority is to help build a platform that fosters relationships of respect and trust.



## Local Contexts <https://localcontexts.org/>

Local Contexts is a global initiative that supports Indigenous communities with tools that attribute cultural authority of heritage and data.

By focusing on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and Indigenous Data Sovereignty, Local Contexts helps Indigenous communities repatriate knowledge and gain control over how their data is collected, managed, displayed, accessed, and used in the future.



AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

## Global Indigenous Data Alliance <https://www.gida-global.org/>

- Advancing Indigenous Data Sovereignty & Governance
- Asserting Indigenous Peoples rights and interests in data
- Advocating for data for the self-determined wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples
- Reinforcing the rights to engage in decision-making in accordance with Indigenous values and collective interests

# Real World Examples - Field Museum of Natural History

# Example - Field Museum 2023

The Field Museum houses both cultural and natural collections. It endeavours to publish its collections information as openly as possible with appropriate attribution.

## Data Norms

## Collection Warnings

# Example - Field Museum - Data Norms

Add subtitle if needed

## USE OF COLLECTIONS DATA AND IMAGES

The Field Museum releases its collections data under the [CC0](#) public domain waiver. This waiver places our biodiversity collections data in the public domain, and we decline to enforce any intellectual property rights we may have in it. The Museum also makes its multimedia based on collections items and specimens publicly available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International ([CC BY-NC](#)) license. This allows for the distribution, publication, and remixing of media for any non-commercial purpose, as long as you credit the Field Museum and follow the other requirements of the Creative Commons license.

**Sharing our collections with  
the world**

Reference: <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/science/research/use-collections-data-and-images>

# Example - Field Museum - Anthropology Collections

Is this a disclaimer or a warning?

The screenshot shows the Field Museum's Anthropology Collections website. The background features a dark, artistic rendering of various human faces and artifacts. A search bar is visible with the text "Search the Collections Records" and a "Start searching" button. A white modal window is overlaid on the page, containing the following text:

**Disclaimer:** The Field Museum's online Anthropology Collections Database may contain cultural items and historical records that are culturally sensitive. Some records may also include offensive language. These records do not reflect the Field Museum's current viewpoint but rather the social attitudes and circumstances of the time period when items were collected or cataloged. Visitors to this site are also advised that some records may contain names, images, and recordings of deceased individuals and that some records document human remains.

**We welcome feedback.** The web database is not a complete record of the Museum's anthropological holdings and documentation for a collection item will vary due to when and how it was collected as well as how recently it was accessed. While efforts are made to ensure the accuracy of the information available on this website, some content may contain errors. We work with descendant communities around the world to interpret the collections in order to promote a greater understanding of global heritage and, through consultation, will remove information that is inaccurate or inappropriate. We encourage and welcome members of descendant communities, scholars, and others to contact us to confirm or clarify data found here.

[Non-Discrimination Statement](#)

[Close this window](#)

Reference: <https://collections-anthropology.fieldmuseum.org/>

# Example - Field Museum 2023

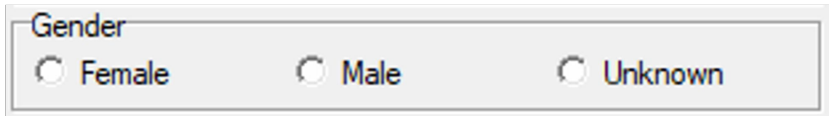
The Field Museum uses the collections management system EMu to house its catalogue records, observations and exhibition management content.

Changes to reflect better  
understanding.

# Databases and data structures

Databases need not be static monoliths and the data structures that they have, can, do and should change over time, to better reflect the understanding of the information that they hold.

BEFORE



Gender

Female  Male  Unknown

AFTER

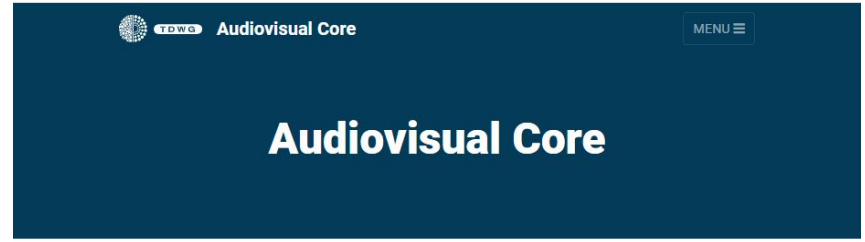


Gender

Male

## Representing People Sex and Gender

Replacing binary options for gender with multi-valued lookup fields allows for a broader range of options. Allowing people to describe themselves as they choose.



Audiovisual Core is a TDWG standard maintained by the Audiovisual Core Maintenance Interest Group. It includes a main vocabulary and

## Redressing harm Naming Conventions

Naming things after people is a common way of acknowledging the impact of a person on science. As more information is revealed these can and should change.

# Thank you!

**Sara Furr**

[www.fieldmuseum.org](http://www.fieldmuseum.org)

**Sharon Grant**

[www.fieldmuseum.org](http://www.fieldmuseum.org)

**Janeen Jones**

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**Helen Robbins**

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**Kate Webbink**

[www.fieldmuseum.org](http://www.fieldmuseum.org)

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For coming back again

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For choosing to be a part of  
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