

# Vegan Language

## Strategic language to keep the focus on animal rights

Why give people an opportunity to pick at our word choice rather than respond to our message? Why use words that could derail the conversation or cause people to shutdown entirely?

Having a moral discussion about animal rights should be the focus of the animal rights movement. This document helps us to do that in an objective and non-derailing way.

It's also important our word choice maintains a consistent stance on anti-oppression. This includes the 'isms' such as racism, sexism, ableism, and speciesism.

We're all different people and have to find the language that works for us. Some of these terms may depend on the situation. It's not about perfection. This list is to encourage us to continue to be mindful about our word choice.

Don't let the fear of saying the wrong thing keep you from advocating for animal rights. I think with a bit of practice and mindfulness we all have the capability to be awesome advocates 😊

This is a working document with contributions from many people. If you have suggestions, please e-mail me at [VeganInteractions@gmail.com](mailto:VeganInteractions@gmail.com) or share your thoughts in the Vegan Interactions Facebook group (@VeganInteractions) to help spark discussions with others so we can learn and grow together.



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## GENERAL TERMS

| Suggestion                    | Used to replace... | Notes  |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| They                          | It                 | Consider saying ‘they’ or he/she when describing other animals. This emphasizes that they are individuals. Also consider ‘who’ versus ‘that/what,’ etc.  |
| Someone                       | Something          |  |
| Other living beings           | Living things      |  |
| Other animals, animal cousins | Animals            | Celebrates our similarities and that we’re all animals, which is the basis for why we all have basic moral rights. (Animal cousins being used when ‘other animals’ may not be clear enough or to articulate the point) |
| Human animal                  | People             |  |
| Building awareness            | Educating          | This could imply that the listener is uneducated.  |
| Spared                        | Saved              | We’re not saving animals by going vegan. The idea is that we will spare future animals from being needlessly bred and killed.  |
| Choose not to eat/use...      | Can eat/use...     | Articulates we can eat them or what comes from them, we choose not to.   |
| Floating slaughterhouse       | Fishing boat       | Helps debunk the speciesism against fishes.  |
| Water prison                  | Aquarium           | Articulates these animals are not free. Also consider ‘aqua prison.’   |
| Zoo inmate                    | Zoo animal         |  |

|   |                              |  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Animal farmer, plant farmer / non-animal farmer | Farmer                       | <p>Articulates that we're opposed to the farming of other animals, not all farming / farmers.</p> <p>This is probably best focused for discussions with people who are not farmers.</p>  |
| Fishes, sea animals                             | Fish, marine life, sea food  | <p>Fishes helps to articulate that they are individuals, not 'fish' which is often measured by the ton.</p> <p>Sea animals helps to highlight the similarities between fishes and other animals, and that they're all individuals who experience life.</p> |
| Chicken's wings                                 | Chicken wings                | <p>Intended to break down the disconnect between the 'product' and the individual 'it' came from.</p>  |
| Ribs  | Ribs from a...               |  |
| Skin  | Leather                      |  |
| Hair from a sheep                               | Wool                         |  |
| Animals who are farmed                          | Farm animals, farmed animals | <p>These could imply animals are meant to be farmed. While farmed animals is better, it's not ideal.</p>   |
| Animal companion                                | Pet, companion animal        | <p>Emphasize that animals are here with us rather than for us and not a possession.</p>  |
| Dogs who I care for, dog friend, guardian       | My dog, I'm their owner      | <p>Companion animal implies it's an animal's purpose is to be our companion, when they are not here to serve us. Word order such as this applies to many things, such as saying horses that are raced rather than racehorses.</p>                          |

## DESCRIBING ANIMAL USE

| <b>Suggestion</b>                    | <b>Used to replace...</b>                             | <b>Notes</b>  |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Rights violations, animal use</b> |   | <p>Brings the focus of the conversations to where it should be, animal rights. For instance:</p> <p>‘Do you think when we use other animals we violate their rights?’</p>   |
|                                      | Animal abuse, cruelty, suffering, welfare             | Subjective terms will leave the discussion open for people to talk about conditions or ‘humane’ farming, rather than ending use.  |
|                                      | Treatment / mistreatment, harmed, mutilated, tortured | Discussing conditions likely leads to a discussion about improving conditions. This is counterproductive if our goal is to end animal use.  |
|                                      | Murder, rape  | <p>We can often say the same thing in a different way with less of a chance of derailing the conversation. This is not to say these terms are not valid. These suggestions are based on effectiveness and how to keep the conversation going.</p> <p>For longer conversations, it may be possible to dismantle speciesist language and ask the person if they think these terms should be applied to other animals.</p> <p>Also consider ‘Unjustly killed,’ ‘forcibly impregnated,’ or simply ‘impregnated’ if speaking with a farmer who may claim the cows in their ‘care’ ‘reproduce naturally.’</p> |

|   |                   |   |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Rights violations, animal use (Continued) | Exploitation      | Technically, exploitation means mistreating someone or benefiting from a resource.<br><br>It's not how we treat animals it's that we use them at all. Exploitation could also imply that animals are resources. |
|   | Standard practice | Implies there's an alternative practice that would be acceptable.   |
|   | Industry          | This puts the focus on factory farming and leaves the door open for them to discuss small farm / backyard discussions.  |
|   | Eating animals    | This is a vegetarian message. If we want to talk about 'food,' we can say 'eat or use.'   |

## GOAL SETTING AND WHAT TO CALL OTHERS

| Suggestion  | Used to replace...   | Notes  |
|---|--|--|
| Vegan,<br>veganism  | Plant-based,<br>vegetarian,<br>pescatarian,<br>etc                             | <p>Setting a clear end goal by talking about veganism will inspire the most change.</p> <p>If a person says they are one of these I praise the positive steps they've taken and then advocate for veganism.</p>  |
| Doing<br>what's right<br>/ just                               | Diet,<br>lifestyle   | <p>Animal rights is about justice, not something that we start and stop as it suits us like a diet.</p>  |
| Non-vegan,<br>vegan-<br>curious,<br>those who<br>aren't vegan | Carnist,<br>meat eater,<br>animal eater,<br>corpse eater,<br>corpse<br>muncher | <p>Terms like carnist are counterproductive as it may shame others or empower them to support animal use.</p> <p>It also suggests human animals are carnivores and puts the focus on eating animals, rather than veganism and the other ways animals' rights are violated.</p> |
|   | Omnivore   | <p>Omnivore implies that we can choose to eat/use animals, when it's not ethical to do so.</p> <p>Being vegan also does not change our biology which this implies.</p>   |

## POTENTIALLY DERAILING WORD CHOICE

| <b>Suggestion</b>                             | <b>Used to replace...</b>                | <b>Notes</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| Inconsistent                                  | Hypocrite                                | These say the same thing in a way that's less likely to derail the conversation.   |
| Justification                                 | Excuse                                   |  |
| Animal advocate                               | Animal activist                          | <p>I've found discussing advocacy with people who are not yet vegan to be less derailing than talking about activism which can have negative connotations.</p> <p>This is situational and I don't see a problem discussing activism within activist circles.</p> |
| Habit   | Addiction                                | This can imply that the situation is beyond their control or be insensitive to those who have suffered from addiction themselves. (This is not to discount that there can be addictions around food)   |
| Morally inconsistent                          | Moral schizophrenia                      | Excludes members of the mental health community.   |
| Cows are unjustly impregnated to produce milk | Cows have to be pregnant to produce milk | Cows can produce milk without being pregnant. While animal use can't rely on this to be consistent / profitable, there's no need to overstate this.  |
| Upset   | Triggered                                | Telling someone they have been triggered may escalate the situation, versus keeping it in a productive space.  |



## EUPHEMISMS

| Suggestion                           | Used to replace...                                  | Notes  |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Using an animal                      | Animal product, meat                                | <p>Implies animals should be considered as a product and reinforces the disconnect most people have from other animals and who they eat / use.</p> <p>Animal product also does not clearly include all animal use, such as when other animals are used for entertainment or when something has been tested on them.</p>                                |
| Flesh                                | Meat  | Helps break down the disconnect between packaged 'meat' and the animal.  |
| Flesh of a cow, pig, etc.            | Beef, pork, etc.                                    | See the notes above for flesh. It's best to talk about the animal something comes from rather than the euphemism. Can simply say the animal if preferred.  |
| Vegan meat                           | Fake meat   | Implies it's not real. Plus ignores that history of the term 'meat' and that it hasn't always been used to describe animal flesh.  |
| Milk from a cow, eggs from a chicken | Milk, normal milk, cow's milk, eggs, chicken's eggs | <p>Emphasizes that the purpose for cows and chickens is not to produce milks and eggs for us.</p> <p>Additionally, these help distinguish milk from a cow and eggs from a chicken from vegan alternatives and that milk from a cow is not normal.</p> <p>Also consider for 'milk' 'calf food,' 'processed calf food' (For cheese) and 'baby food.'</p> |

## COMPARISONS TO HUMAN ANIMAL INJUSTICES

| Suggestion | Used to replace...            | Notes   |
|------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Animal Use | Slavery, abolition, holocaust | <p>As these terms are typically used to discuss human animal injustices, people are less likely to make the connection to other animals if we use them. The listener may also think we're implying that they're like a slave owner or a Nazi.</p> <p>It's not a matter of whether these comparisons are valid. It's more of a matter if these comparisons will motivate them to respect animals and their rights stop supporting their use.</p> <p>In short, if these comparisons are not necessary to make the case for animal rights, why make our jobs harder?</p> <p><u>Caveat: (Longer conversations)</u><br/>                     If these analogies are to be used, it's encouraged to refer to 'the animal holocaust' vs 'the holocaust' and 'animal enslavement' vs 'slavery.' These will have a better chance of drawing the focus to animals.</p> <p>When comparing human animals to other animals, we should also be prepared to explain that we're not seeking equal rights, we're seeking equal <i>basic moral</i> rights for other animals. (Also consider discussing negative vs positive rights)</p> |

## PHRASES TO CONSIDER AVOIDING

| Suggestion   | Notes   |
|--|---|
| Calling someone a pig, cow, predator, beast, etc.        | Comparing a person to most animals is derogatory and implies a negative view toward other animals.  |
| Kill two birds with one stone, open a can of worms, etc. | There are numerous expressions like this. We should try to avoid these phrases as they lessen the value of other animals.<br><br>Colleen Patrick-Goudreau offers several alternatives: <a href="https://youtu.be/mU70LvwZoNw">https://youtu.be/mU70LvwZoNw</a>                    |
| Calling other animals voiceless                          | Anyone who has heard our animal cousins cry out can attest that other animals do have a voice. We're just not listening and don't understand their language. Consider 'unheard' or 'silenced' instead.  |
| Cognitive Dissonance (Be selective with use)             | This term is when someone is uncomfortable with a contradictory belief. Oftentimes people aren't uncomfortable with the idea of using animals, so this phrase should be limited to when people express discomfort with animal use.  |
| Kindness, compassion                                     | Animal rights is about more than kindness and compassion. Animal rights is a matter of strict justice. Using words like kindness or compassion dilute this message.   |
| Animal lives matter                                      | Asking whether we should value other animals / respect their rights says a similar thing, without unintentional racist implications. (Especially in the U.S. where saying things like all lives matter can be considered racist as a response to the black lives matter movement) |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Pests  | Consider other animals, or one of the suggestions for that in the general terms section.  |
| Wild   | Instead consider ‘free-living’ as less speciesist. Also consider ‘regulated killing’ rather than ‘wildlife management.’   |
| Animals first, it’s all about the animals, for the animals | <p>Most activists have the same end goal, to end animal use. Saying we’re doing something ‘for the animals’ is superfluous and often used to mask problematic behavior that may warrant further discussion.</p> <p>It’s also not necessary to have our sole focus be on our animal cousins. Animal rights is an extension of human rights, not opposed to it. We can discuss both in conjunction, without limiting our impact.</p> <p>For instance if someone may say ‘animals don’t have rights.’ Asking them if they think human animals have rights and building the conversation from there doesn’t weaken the case for animal rights, it strengthens it. After all, other animals have basic moral rights for the same reason we do, they experience life.</p> |

For other documents like this such as the discussion guide and responses to common justifications, see:

<https://www.veganinteractions.com/>



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