



# Reframing Ageing

Changing How We Communicate about Older People

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# Objectives

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In this lesson, you will:

1. Learn about a national movement intended to reframe how the public communicates about older people.
2. Examine your own implicit bias against older people.
3. Practice applying the communication principles to public statements and social media.

# A Brief History

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The **Reframing Aging** initiative started in 2012, when eight national aging organizations gathered to address the entrenched ageism in American society.

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The organizations collaborated with the social science research firm FrameWorks Institute to examine exactly what the American public thinks of aging.

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Research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute found that the public's perception of aging is decidedly negative, and opposite of how most older people feel and what experts in the field know to be true.

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The following slides include key findings and recommendations from the **Reframing Aging** initiative, summarized for you as **5 important lessons**.

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# Lesson 1: Word Choice Matters

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The FrameWorks Institute conducted an experiment. They provided study participants with five terms for older people and asked them to rate each term on a five-point scale across a number of competence-related adjectives (e.g. “technologically capable,” “frail,” “independent,” or “wise”). Ratings were averaged to create an overall measure of perceived competence. The resulting analysis (below) reveals a continuum of competence associated with different labels.



*Recommendation: Use the term “older adult” or “older person”*

# Terms of Reference

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## ACCEPTABLE TERMS

- Older Adults or Older People
- In healthcare, an age specific term of reference is often preferred (Example: 87-year-old male)
- Use “elder” only when culturally appropriate; elders are highly regarded in Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native American, Afghan cultures.



## UNACCEPTABLE TERMS

- Seniors
- The Elderly
- Senior Citizens
- Old People

# Lesson 2: Avoid “Other-ing” Older People

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Aging is a continuous and normal process. All of us are aging, every second of every day.

However, the FrameWorks Institute found that Americans mentally model older adults as “others” -- a separate, special group that is not part of us.

One way we establish a group as an “other” is with pronouns: They/Them vs. We/Us

*Recommendation: Find ways to replace “they or them” with “we or us”. Instead of using phrasing that implies that aging happens to someone else, look for more inclusive wording. Whether the speaker is 20, 40, or 80 years old, this language suggests that all of us - now and later - are part of a community of people who are aging.*

Example of “other” language: “Older adults need different transportation options as they age.”

Example of inclusive language: “As we age, we may need different options for transportation.”



# Implicit Bias

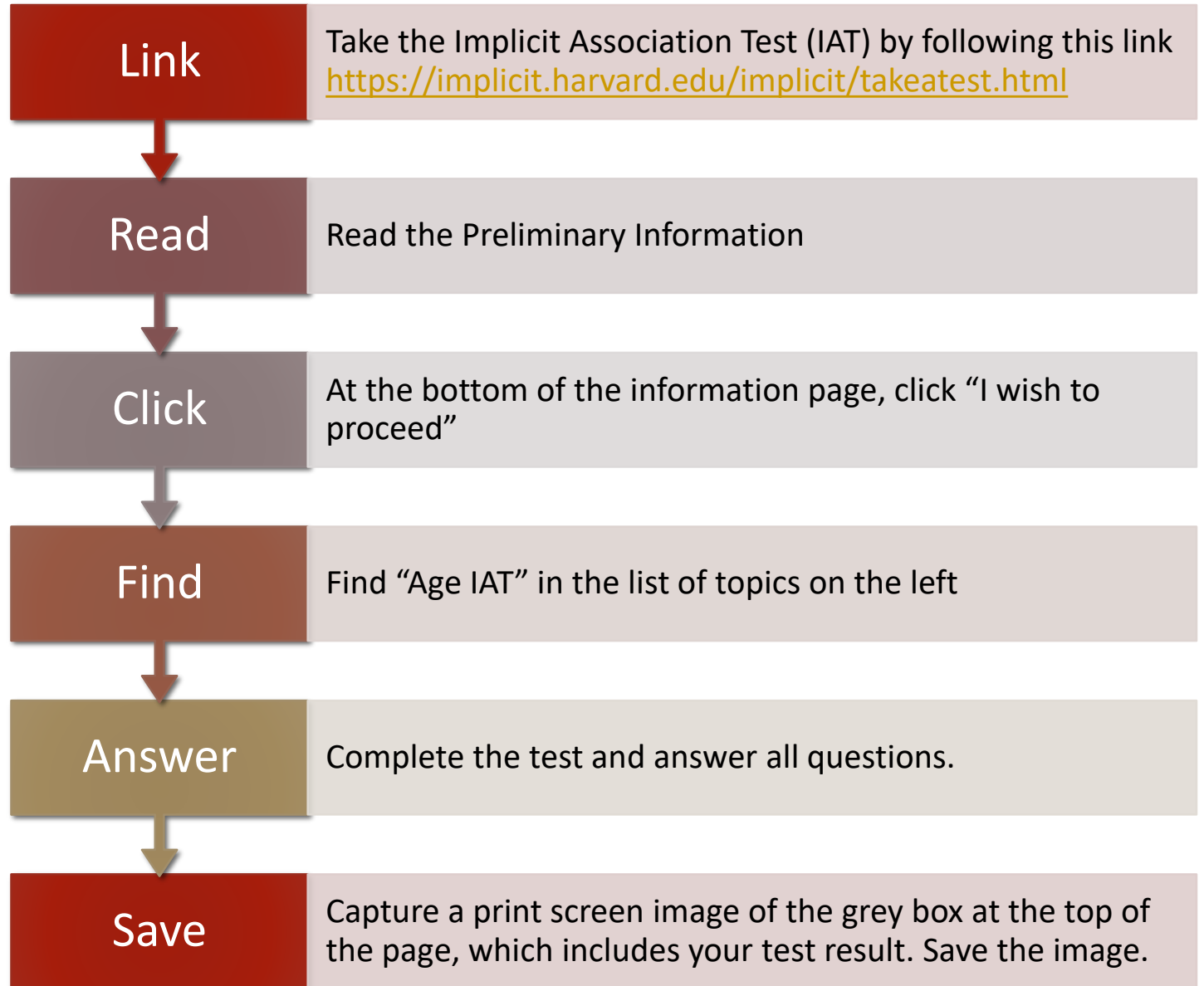
Prejudice is often implicit — people aren't even aware of their own prejudices.

We are all exposed to negative messages about older people, so our brains are wired to form snap judgments about people based on their age.

For example, because of years of exposure to the news and common movie characters, many people subconsciously assume that older people are forgetful, grouchy, or frail. These stereotypes lead to discrimination against older people in many areas of life, from health care to the workplace.



# Examine Your Implicit Bias

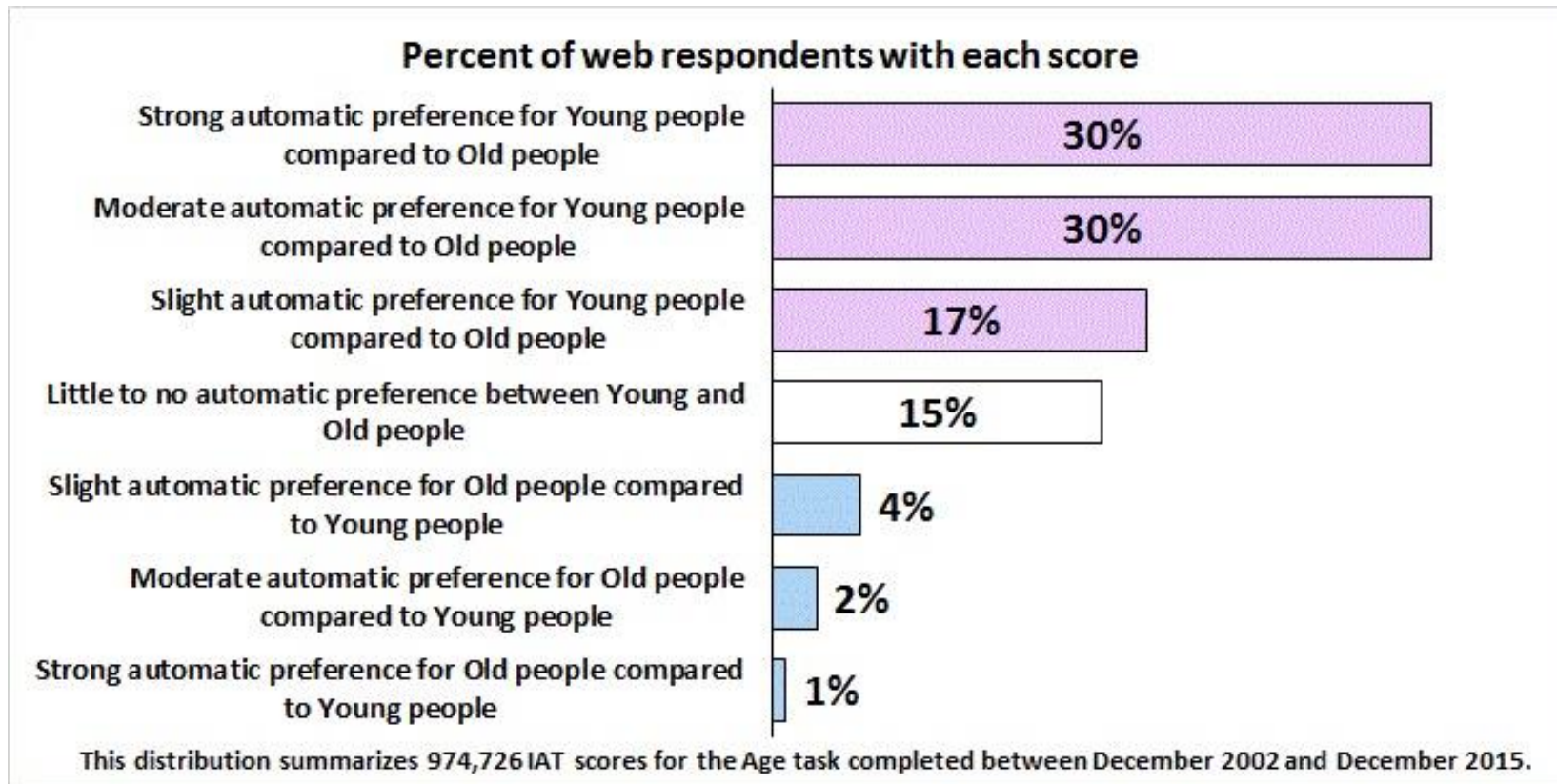




# Implicit Bias

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Compare your personal results with the study norms below.



# Lesson 3: Reduce Implicit Bias

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Once we know about these unintentional implicit biases, we become less likely to act on snap judgments and more likely to treat people fairly, regardless of age.

Research suggests that one way to reduce implicit bias against older adults is to reframe messages about aging. This serves to actively undermine deep and durable stereotypes about older adults by promoting a positive understanding of the aging process.

*Recommendation: Promote a more positive understanding of the aging process by reframing your messages. Choose your words carefully. Avoid making snap judgements of people based upon their age.*

Another way to reduce implicit bias is to encourage training in the workplace and to create policies that prevent people from making premature judgments based solely on age. For example, we could change job application forms that require people to disclose the year they graduated from high school.

# Ageism

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- Ageism is stereotyping or discriminating against people based on age.
- Healthcare providers may be predisposed to ageism due to repeated exposure to chronically ill or medically fragile patients early in their clinical training.
- Ageism among healthcare providers can affect treatment options and may result in disparities in health care for the elderly.



# Lesson 4: Name It

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The FrameWorks Institute's research found that **ageism** is not recognized as a problem by the public; in fact, the concept is completely absent from their thinking.

A lack of public recognition perpetuates ageism. People fail to see their thinking as discriminatory. Widespread misconceptions & outdated ways of thinking remain in place.

*Recommendation: Name it. Define it. Don't try to compare ageism to other "isms" like racism or sexism. Educate the public about ageism by calling it what it is.*

Example: "Ageism is discrimination based on prejudices about age. It often involves the assumption that older people are less competent than younger people. Ageism has a huge negative impact on older people, throughout all areas of life. #EndAgeism"

# Lesson 5: Use This Powerful Metaphor

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The public commonly thinks of aging in negative terms. Later life is viewed as a period of decline, deterioration, disease, and disability. One of the few positive associations the public has with later life is an accumulation of wisdom.

The FrameWorks Institute tested several ways of framing messages about aging as a way to counteract this negative mental model.

Controlled survey experiments revealed that using the **Building Momentum** metaphor was the most effective frame of those tested. The results were dramatic. Using this metaphor:

- Built more positive attitudes toward aging
- **Reduced implicit bias against older people by 30%**

## Building Momentum Metaphor

*Getting older is a dynamic process that involves constant change. When we're young, we need a boost to get moving. As we age, we gather momentum through the build-up of life experiences and insights. This momentum can add power and force to moving our communities forward—and so, as a society, we should do all we can to support older people and make the most of later life.*



# Your Assignment (Due Monday May 3, 2021)

1. In a Word document, type your name and the date at the top.
2. Write a short reflection of your Implicit Association Test result. What was your result? Did it surprise you? How did your result compare to others in the study? (see slides 8 & 9)
3. Select any topic addressed in the NWD-E2 sessions this year. Demonstrate your understanding of the 5 communication lessons by writing 2 Tweets about your chosen topic. For suggestions on how to reframe your messages, review the [Twitter examples](#) developed by The FrameWorks Institute.
  - Audience = public
  - Maximum of 280 characters
  - Optional: include an image or photo; maximum 1 image per Tweet
4. Reflect on your first year in the NWD-E2 program. Write a short description about what participation in this program has meant to you (now or in the future). How has NWD-E2 impacted you? Has it influenced how you think about older people? NOTE: Your answer will be shared publicly in the upcoming NWD-E2 newsletter. Demonstrate your understanding of the five lessons contained in this presentation by selecting your words carefully.
5. Email your assignment to [christeljulia.tud@marquette.edu](mailto:christeljulia.tud@marquette.edu) no later than 12noon on May 3.