

Becker  
CW  
Diction &  
Rules around Language

You might be wondering if it's 'okay' to use objectionable language (swearing, taboo language) in your writing. The short answer is, yes, it's fine to do so, but you need to have a good reason (hint: *it sounds cool* isn't really a reason). Here are some basic guidelines to inform your choices:

1. Some of the best writers swear, a lot. (Grace Paley, Kurt Vonnegut, Bulowski) Some of the best writers don't really (Adrienne Rich, Annie Dillard, William Faulkner).
2. Make good choices, based on character and/or audience and/or tone. In other words, yes, if your character is prone to expletive-filled outbursts, then by all means, go for it. But if the swearing is the ONLY thing your readers notice, you're overusing your swear words.
3. Similarly, think about how your readers might respond to whatever language you're using. If the goal is to shock and provoke, you'll likely accomplish that, but at what cost? If the reader feels alienated, you might be in trouble.
4. The same goes for taboo or objectionable language. Remember dialogue doesn't have to be fully accurate to be believable. You wouldn't go up to something and say, 'hey, how's it going, you motherf\*\*\*ing as\*\*\*\*', so, don't do it in your writing. There's a case to be made for not saying everything you think a character *could* utter. (We'd all be in trouble if we said everything we *could* say). You're in control. You're the driver.
5. Hate speech, or something truly cruel, can work if your character is confronting it, or perpetrating it, but never if it is included to harm another (living) person.

So in other words, use good judgment.