

Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Communication



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Pronouns

It is recommended that the use of the singular pronouns, “he, him, his, she, her, hers” be avoided except when referring to a specific person. The following examples illustrate a more inclusive approach:

Repeat the Noun

Example: You provide an environment where all the child’s physical needs are met and where *his* health and safety are not endangered.

Change to: You provide an environment where all the child’s physical needs are met and where *the child’s* health and safety are not endangered.

Use Plural Pronouns

Example: Each inspector should ensure *his* staff is aware of the cost.

Change to: Inspectors should ensure *their* staff are aware of the cost.

Use a Neutral Noun, Title or Other Description for the Pronoun

Example: He will check the doors each night.

Change to: The *security officer* will check the doors each night.

Reword the Sentence

Example: The intake worker may become aware of other concerns of the applicant as *he* conducts the intake appointment.

Change to: The intake worker may become aware of other concerns of the applicant *as the intake appointment proceeds*.

Use “He or She,” “His or Her” as Appropriate

Example: A person in need is defined generally as someone who is unable to provide adequately for *himself* or *his* family on the basis of a test that relates *his* liabilities to *his* assets.

Change to: Persons in need are defined generally as those who are unable to provide adequately for *themselves* or *their* families on the basis of a test that relates *their* liabilities to *their* assets.

or

A person in need is defined as someone who is unable to provide **or** adequately for *himself* or *herself*, and *his* or *her* family on the basis of a test that relates *his* or *her* liabilities to *his* or *her* assets.

Alternate Male and Female Expressions and Examples

Depending on the circumstance, there are times when it is better to alternate use of “he and she” rather than a nonspecific pronoun. “*S/he*” is not recommended.

Example: Let each individual participate. Has *she* had the opportunity to speak?
Has *he* taken the initiative?

Animals, vehicles, machinery, etc. are referred to as “it” except in the case of an animal when “he” or “she” may be used if the sex is known and is relevant.

Generic

Language should be used in a way that accords respect to all people. When faced with a situation describing people in general, consider alternatives to the generic “man” label. People do not necessarily hear the word “man” the way the writer or speaker thinks they will.

Non-Inclusive

mankind
manpower
man in the street
Is the booth manned?

Inclusive

humanity
labour
ordinary people
Is the booth staffed?

When choosing words to replace “man”, use terms that include women and men. If the situation does not support alternatives to using the word “man”, make every effort to use examples, pictures, or graphics that illustrate inclusion of women and men.

It is not appropriate to eliminate all words that contain “man.” Many do not have the same Old English root as “man” and should not be changed. Words such as manipulate, manuscript and mandate stem from the Latin word “manus,” meaning “hand.” Words like these are listed in dictionaries usually with notes identifying their root and usage.

Titles/Forms of address

The context in which many occupational titles were created no longer exists. Domination of an occupation by one sex or the other tended to create the assumption that certain roles were only for men or only for women. Exclusive language is no longer appropriate and inclusive terms should be used.

Non-Inclusive

mailman
policeman
stewardess
foreman

Inclusive

mail carrier
police officer
flight attendant
supervisor

Avoid the “ess” and “ette” words that have in the past been used to apply to women. These endings diminish the status of the root word. For example, authors can be male or female and there is no need for “authoress” or “female writer” to be used when talking about women.

There is no need to qualify occupational titles that apply to women and men unless the person’s sex is relevant. Reference to the sex of the person puts the emphasis on the personal characteristic rather than occupational knowledge and skills, e.g., “woman doctor,” “female lawyer,” “male nurse.”

It is possible to portray how members of each sex perform roles that were traditionally the occupations of one or the other.

Non-inclusive

Inclusive

Non-inclusive

Inclusive

doctors, their wives and children

doctors, their spouses and children

clerks, their husbands and children

clerks, their spouses and children

Avoid descriptions of jobs, roles or personal characteristics that reflect gender-specific stereotyping. Referring to women’s or men’s roles as wife or husband, or to their physical appearances, is not appropriate unless it is relevant within the context of the situation.

It is both inconsistent and inappropriate to use generic titles for women and the more common non-generic titles for men. If specific words are in use, parallel language can be substituted.

Example: Beth will continue as the **chairperson** of the finance committee and Rob is the new **chairman** of the social committee.

Change to: Beth will continue **chairing** the finance committee and Rob will **chair** the social committee.

Non-Inclusive

man and wife
men and ladies
girls and young men

Inclusive

husband and wife
men and women
girls and boys or
young women and young men

Parallel treatment should also be used when referring to couples and work associates.

Example: Mr. and Mrs. Bob Black

Change to: Bob and Jill Black

Example: Barb Green and her accountant, Larry Miller

Change to: manager, Barb Green, and accountant, Larry Miller

Correspondence

Whenever possible, use the form of address preferred by the recipient. It is correct to use a woman's full name or her initials if you are unaware of her preferred form of address or are unsure of the recipient's sex from the name or initials. "Dear Sir or Madam" is also acceptable. It is possible to delete the salutation depending upon the format of your document. The following salutations are appropriate:

Dear Patricia Smith

Dear Pat Smith

Dear P. J. Smith

Other inclusive salutations include:

Dear manager

Dear reader

Dear member

Visual representation

When preparing photos, videos, brochures, slides or graphics for presentations, represent women and men actively participating in all aspects of life at home, school, work or within the community. A balance of images to reflect the population is recommended. Men and women can be shown in non-traditional roles such as women as plumbers or men as caregivers.

Promote a balanced presentation of women in authority positions. Consider posture and positioning within a picture to help establish that this balance is present; for example, avoid portraying men behind desks and women standing to the side.

It is important to ensure that animation or cartoons do not base their humour on gender stereotypes.

Oral communications

Oral communications should reflect and complement a gender-inclusive style, similar to the written and visual forms of communication. A balanced representation is achievable in oral communication by

- using both women and men as interviewers, trainers and speakers at events;
- using both women and men in voice-overs regardless of subject material.

Sources

Gender Themes in Communications; Diversity and Justice: Gender Perspectives, Federal Department of Justice, 1998.

Guidelines for Gender-Neutral Communication, PEI Women's Secretariat, 1990.

Words That Count Women In, Ontario Women's Directorate, 1998