

Bias-free language

Bias-free language means using terms that treat people with respect. Most of us have no desire to offend anyone, but we occasionally do it unintentionally.

We must be aware of the need to use a language that recognizes our diversity and does not offend or exclude people on the basis of:

- **Gender**
- **Sexual Orientation**
- **Racial and Ethnic Identity**
- **Disabilities**

Rather than limiting and censoring language, the intention is to expand it so as to include all people on an equal basis.

Bias-free language: GENDER

The language we use reflects the values of the society in which we live.
The English language has developed in a male-dominated, male-centred society.

Sexism is discrimination on the basis of gender. In order to avoid such discrimination, it is important to use a non-sexist, gender-neutral language.



AVOID "MAN" AS FALSE GENERIC

It is often claimed that 'man' is a generic term, i.e. that it refers to all humans, male and female. Whether the intention, the use of 'man' obscures the presence and contribution of women.

When we use 'man' it conjures up images of male persons only, not females or males and females together.



mankind
man the operation
manpower
manmade
The man on the street



People, humanity, human beings
staff the operation
Human resources
Manufactured, artificial
The ordinary person



AVOID GENERIC USE OF MALE PRONOUNS

The 'generic' use of male pronouns, 'he, his, him', is misleading and exclusive. Simply stating that male pronouns should be understood to include females does not suffice. Male pronouns should be used only in relation to males. When referring to humans in general, or to a group which includes both females and males, avoid the exclusive use of 'he'.



Each student must complete his assessment by Friday
The lecturer will display his timetable on his office door

PLURAL →



Student must complete their assessment by Friday
Lecturers will display their timetable on their office door

He must return it by the due date

PASSIVE →

It must be returned by the due date

A student who wants his essay returned....

INDEFINITES →

Anyone who wants an essay returned



AVOID "MAN" AND "WOMAN" IN JOBS TITLES

Sex-labelled job titles reinforce the assumption that the job can be, and is only, done by persons of one sex. It is unnecessary to specify the gender of a person who works in a job which has traditionally been done mainly by members of the other sex. To do so reinforces the notion that the job is specifically male or female and makes the statement that it is unusual and out of place for that person to be doing that work.



Chairman
Policeman
Sales girl
Spokesman
Founding Fathers
Steward, air hostess
Poetess, actress, usherette
Gentleman's agreement



Chair, director
Police officer
Sales assistant
Spokesperson
Founders
Flight attendant
Poet, actor, usher
Unwritten agreement



AVOID SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING

Sex-role stereotyping is assuming that certain traits, ways of behaving, interacting with others, working, etc., are 'naturally' associated with each sex. It is seen as inappropriate for one sex to act in a manner associated with the other sex. Our language reflects our notions of appropriate behaviour for each sex. However, if we are to represent accurately the reality and diversity of people's lives we need to move away from narrow and limiting behaviour models for people.



She is a good basketball player.
She shoots like a man.
A brilliant female researcher.
Lecturers and their wives are invited to attend.
She is very masculine.
What is needed is the feminine touch.
Mrs, Miss.



She is a good basketball player.
She shoots well.
A brilliant researcher.
Lecturers and their partners are invited to attend.
She is a strong/assertive woman.
What is needed is a caring attitude.
Ms



"Gender orientation" and "sexual orientation" are preferred to "sexual preference," a term which implies that being homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual is a matter of choice, and that sex is the focus of the relationship.



Most gay people prefer the term "gay" to the somewhat clinical "homosexual." The term "gay" may be used to refer to both men and women, but "lesbian" is the term preferred by gay women. Keep in mind that people of a bisexual orientation may not consider themselves to be part of either the gay or heterosexual community.



Avoid using "gay lifestyle" or "lesbian lifestyle." Being gay or lesbian is not a lifestyle; it is a fundamental orientation. In addition, gays' lives and relationships are as diverse as those of the rest of the population.



Avoid identifying people by race or ethnic group unless it is relevant. We don't usually point out that an individual is white. The same rule should apply to other groups.



Andrew Young, the black mayor of Atlanta, cast his vote.

Maria Duran, an Hispanic professor of Physics, has been promoted to associate professor.



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Avoid the term "non-white," which sets up white culture as the standard by which all other cultures should be judged. Also avoid "culturally disadvantaged" and "culturally deprived." These terms imply that the dominant culture is superior to other cultures or that other groups lack a culture.



Avoid words, images or situations that reinforce stereotypes and that imply all people of a particular race or ethnic group are the same.



Not surprisingly, the Asian-American students did best in the math contest.



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Avoid the adjectives "skin-coloured" or "flesh-coloured". Not everyone's *flesh* is white, but skin or flesh come in many colors. Make-up, plasters and tights – even when they're marked "flesh-coloured" or "skin-coloured" – are not the colour of skin that isn't white.

Note: In 1962 Crayola voluntarily changed the flesh-colored crayon to Peach: this was one of the small but significant victory of civil rights movements.



Some common and preferred phrases to describe racial ethnic identity are:

African: a person from one of the many countries on the continent of Africa; if possible, rather than African, provide the nationality of the person (Kenyan, Ethiopian, etc.)

African American: a black American who is from or has ancestors from Africa and has become an American or was born in the United States (Kenyan American, Ethiopian American, etc.).

Arab: a person whose native language is Arabic (Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, etc.)

Asian: a person from Asia, which includes Japan, Korea, China, Vietnam

black: refers to a person of African descent, who could be from anywhere in the world and of any nationality or cultural identity.

Hispanic: a person who is from or has ancestors from a Spanish-speaking country; could be from Spain, United States, Mexico or any country in Central or South America.

Jewish: a person whose ethnic origin includes the Jewish religious and or/cultural traditions; preferred over *Jew*.

Latin American: an American who comes from or has ancestors from Central or South America or parts of the United States where the national language is Spanish.

Native American: a person whose ancestors were native to the Americas before European settlement (e.g. Cherokee, Mayan, Choctaw, Iroquois, etc).

white: refers to people of European descent, all over the world, except for those who identify themselves as Hispanic.



Be sensitive to religion when referring to various ethnic groups. Don't make assumptions. For instance, just as not all Arabs are Muslims, most nationalities and ethnicities will embody different religious practices. Avoid stereotyping a race, nationality or ethnic group with a specific religion.



Be sure your communications do not patronize or give token attention to members of racial or ethnic groups. Exaggerated focus on people's accomplishments or insincere and gratuitous references to their concerns imply that they are not normally successful or accomplished, or are not considered to be in the mainstream of society.



Put people first, not their disability

Avoid the implication that the person as a whole is disabled.



disabled person
defective child
mentally ill person



person with (who has) a disability
child with a congenital disability
person with mental illness



Do not label people by their disability

People with disabilities should not be referred to as patients or invalids unless the illness status is under discussion.



depressives
epileptics
neurotic patients
retarded adult



people who are depressed
individuals with epilepsy
patients with a neurosis
adult with intellectual disabilities



Avoid offensive expressions



cripple
deformed
mongoloid
crazy



Person who has a limp
Person with a shortened arm
Person with Down Syndrome
Person with symptoms of mental illness