



Gender-Neutral

"Biased language can cause your reader to focus on how you say something rather than what you say. If your language is free of bias, it should offend no one; ideally, no one should even notice that you have made an effort to reduce sexually biased words and phrases."¹

Nouns

The problem of gender-exclusive language is apparent in limited pronouns; however, there are alternatives.

Instead of:

mankind
chairman
businessman
policeman
mailman
man-made
congressman
fireman
man

Try:

humanity, people, humankind
chair, chairperson
business executive
police officer
mail carrier
synthetic, manufactured
congressional representative
firefighter
person, human

Pronouns

First Person Singular Pronouns (all-inclusive)

I, me, mine, my

First Person Plural Pronouns (all-inclusive)

we, us, our, ours

Second Person Pronouns (all-inclusive)

you, yours, your

Third Person Plural Pronouns (all-inclusive)

they, theirs, their, them

Third Person Singular Pronouns (limited)

him, his, he, she, her, hers, it, its

Alternatives to Limited Pronouns

Recast both the noun and pronoun as plural.

Instead of: *A student should get his advisor's signature before registering.*

Try: *Students should get their advisors' signatures before registering.*

Use his and her with an indefinite pronoun (everybody, everyone, anybody, anyone).

Instead of: *Everyone should bring his favorite snack to the picnic.*

Try: *Everyone should bring his or her favorite snack to the picnic.*



Repeat the noun.

Instead of: *If your doctor doesn't call you back, feel free to call him again.*

Try: *If your doctor doesn't call you back, feel free to call the doctor again.*

Reword to omit the pronoun.

Instead of: *If you aren't sure what your professor meant, ask him to clarify his comments.*

Try: *Ask your professor to clarify any comments you didn't understand.*

Use "he or she" in place of "he."

Instead of: *When the tennis player finishes the match, he should exit the court.*

Try: *When the tennis player finishes the match, he or she should exit the court.*

Alternate male and female pronouns in individual examples.

Instead of: *Your child may have a variety of needs. He might have a difficult time learning to walk, or he might find the teething process especially painful.*

Try: *Your child may have a variety of needs. He might have a difficult time learning to walk, or she might find the teething process especially painful.*

Use the second person instead of the third person.

(However, the second person is not used in academic writing.)

Instead of: *When a student finishes his paper, he should turn it face down on his desk.*

Try: *When you finish your paper, turn it face down on your desk.*

Use the same criteria for describing both genders.

Instead of: *Mr. Smith is a successful lawyer, and his wife is a striking brunette.*

Try: *Mr. Smith is a successful lawyer, and Mrs. Smith is a talented computer analyst.*

Or: *Mr. Smith is a good-looking blond, and Mrs. Smith is a striking brunette.*

DO NOT use a plural pronoun with a singular subject.

Incorrect: *If your friend does something unkind to you, do not repay their evil with evil.*

Correct: *If your friends do something unkind to you, do not repay their evil with evil.*

¹The quotation at the beginning of this handout was taken from "Reducing Sexually Biased Language in Business Communication" by Daphne A. James on in *Readings in Business Communication*. Ed. by Robert D. Gieselman. Champaign, IL: Stipes, 1979, 170-178.