

AVOIDING SEXUAL, RACIAL, AND ETHNIC STEREOTYPING

Use Pronouns Correctly without Sounding Sexist

Pronouns (*she, hers, her, he, his, him, they, theirs, them*, etc.) are substitutes for nouns. A pronoun should agree in number and person with the noun to which it refers. This grammatical rule remains the generally accepted practice in formal writing. For example, the sentence *Each student should bring their books* is considered faulty because *Each student* is singular, whereas the pronoun *their* is plural. The traditional solution was to write *Each student should bring his books*, the justification being that the pronouns *he, his*, and *him* conventionally denote both male and female subjects. That argument has become socially unacceptable.

In most cases, the best solution is **to switch from singular to plural forms**: for example, *All students should bring their books* applies equally well to students of either sex. Another approach is **to eliminate the pronoun by rewriting**. For example, *Style is partly a matter of the author expressing his personality* might become *Style is partly an expression of the author's personality*.

The occasional use of *he or she* (or *she or he*) is acceptable: for example, *The average Canadian, never investing more than he or she can afford to lose, can hope to remain a step or two ahead of inflation*. Another acceptable approach is the occasional use of *one*: for example, *In Kingston, one can live on ten dollars a day provided one is willing to give up eating*. These forms, however, sound awkward when frequently repeated.

Other options, such as *he/she* or *s/he*, are less widely accepted than the preceding forms, perhaps because they look unattractive and are difficult or impossible to say. Still, *he/she* or *his/her* have a place in legal documents in which one of the alternatives is to be crossed out.

General Points about Sexual Stereotyping

Do not suggest that certain characteristics or situations typify men, whereas others typify women. For example, do not automatically ascribe emotions, feelings, and intuitions to women, physical and mental prowess to men (thereby offending intellectual women, athletic women, sensitive men, and intuitive men). And when describing men in terms of careers or mental attributes, do not describe women simply in terms of physical attributes (for example, *Joe McPherson is a respected police officer, his wife Maureen a striking blonde*). Refer to women by the title and name they prefer (*Miss, Ms., Mrs., or Maureen McTeer*, not *Mrs. Joe Clark*). If in doubt about the preferred title, use the neutral form (*Ms. Mary Munro*) or simply the name (*Mary Munro*). In correspondence, if the sex of the addressee is unknown, use initials (*Dear M.P. Munro*). If neither gender nor name is known, use *Dear Sir/Madam*.

Consider using neutral terminology

Instead of:	fireman policeman mailman a man no man housewife steward/stewardess man-made mankind forefathers man-in-the-street man-hours workman Frenchmen	Try:	fire fighter police officer letter carrier anybody, anyone nobody, no one homemaker flight attendant manufactured, synthetic humanity, people ancestors ordinary people working hours worker the French
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Avoid patronizing terms or phrases

Instead of:	little lady, old lady girl (for adult female) fair sex co-ed	Try:	wife, spouse woman women student
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Avoid stereotyping jobs and careers, or drawing unnecessary attention to gender

Instead of:	authoress lady doctor, lawyer girl Friday male nurse cleaning lady	Try:	author doctor, lawyer secretary/administrative assistant nurse cleaner
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Use parallel language

Instead of:	men and ladies man and wife Mr. and Mrs. John Smith	Try:	men and women husband and wife Mr. and Mrs. Smith/John and Mary Smith
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Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Stereotyping

- **Do not attribute specific attributes to general groups.** For example, do not refer to *thrifty Scots*, *amorous Italians*, *polite Canadians*.
- **Avoid modifiers which suggest that one group is an exception to the rule.** For example, *The company employed a group of intelligent black students* could imply that it is unusual for black students to be intelligent. Substitute *a group of black students* or *a group of intelligent students*.
- **Be cautious about using adjectives that in some contexts have questionable or insulting racial or ethnic overtones.** For example, *savage*, *lazy*, *backward*, *yellow*, *red*.
- **Identify racial and cultural groups by the names the groups themselves prefer.** For example, *Black* not *negro*, *Inuk*, *Inuit* not *Eskimo*, *Native* or *Aboriginal*, not *Indian*.