

AVOIDING SEXIST LANGUAGE

SEXIST FORMS OF LANGUAGE

In any form of writing, using words which are demeaning or which do not afford a sense of equality to the reader is not a good practice. Therefore, some guidelines exist to help to avoid using language, which discriminates or overexploits particular differences among people.

1. Try to avoid sexist language by using only terms, which are gender-neutral (that is, they can be used by either a man or a woman).

EX:

Businessman (Worse)

Businessperson (Better)

EX:

Policeman (Worse)

Police Officer (Better)

EX:

Mankind (Worse)

Humankind (Better)

2. Do not assume that a profession strictly contains one gender or other.

EX:

See if you can get the doctor. He has to be here somewhere. (Worse)
[Note that perhaps the doctor is a female].

See if you can get a doctor. One has to be here somewhere. (Better)

3. If you have a sexist singular pronoun, then switch to a more gender-neutral word (even using a quantifier or the numbers of people/things if needed); otherwise, when referring to people of unknown gender, use the word pair HE/SHE (or HE OR SHE) in place of the singular pronoun (to indicate an either/or condition).

EX:

A doctor is coming. He will be here shortly. (Worse)

A doctor is coming. One will be here shortly. (Better)

A doctor is coming. Someone will be here shortly (Better)

A doctor is coming. He or she will be here shortly. (Better)

HE OR SHE

If the sex/gender of a person is unknown, you may write one of the following:

+he or she

+he/she

+s/he