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# The University of Sydney

## *Language Guidelines*

Senate policy states that the University community regards as offensive, under all circumstances, the use of written or spoken language which makes personal or irrelevant reference to race or sex.

### **Non-sexist language**

Also called gender neutral, non-gender specific or inclusive language, non-sexist language refers to language that includes women and treats women and men equally. Language changes constantly in response to our needs. Many of the conventions of language originating in the past contradict the principles of equality of the sexes. It is important that those involved in University activities, including teaching, bear this in mind. The Senate has amended its resolutions and changed titles such as Chairman consistent with the policy.

### **How to use non-sexist language**

#### **1. Titles of address, rank, occupation, status**

As a general rule, use a first name, a neutral title or nothing. Where titles are appropriate, use parallel titles.

Instead of . . . . . Use

Miss or Mrs . . . . . Ms to parallel Mr (except where the woman prefers Miss or Mrs)

Contact Professor Brown or . . . Contact Professor Brown or Ms Smith, Secretary  
his Secretary, Mary

When listing names, use alphabetical order except where order by seniority is more important.

If addressing correspondents whose name and gender are unknown, do not assume they are male.

#### **2. Personal pronouns**

Use he, his, him, himself only when referring specifically to a male person.

The use of he and she, she and he, she/he, s/he to refer to either female or male persons can be cumbersome. The following are acceptable alternatives.

(a) Rewrite the sentence in the plural.

Instead of . . . . . Use

The lecturer will display his . . . Lecturers will display their timetables on their office doors.  
timetable on his office door.

Each student is responsible . . . . Students are responsible for material they borrow.  
for material on loan to him.

(b) Rewrite the sentence in the passive.

Instead of . . . . . Use

He must return it by the due date . . . .It must be returned by the due date.

(c) Rewrite using the pronoun `they' after indefinite pronouns such as each, someone, anyone, nobody.

Instead of . . . . . Use

Anyone who wants his work evaluated. . . .Anyone who wants their work evaluated..

However, a more acceptable form would be

Those who want their work evaluated..

(d) Rewrite omitting pronouns

Anyone wanting work evaluated..

It is not acceptable to present material with the disclaimer that all masculine nouns and pronouns are to be taken as referring to both females and males.

### **3. Patronising and demeaning expressions**

Avoid terms or expressions that are patronising and demeaning.

Instead of . . . . . Use

The girls in the office . . . . .The secretaries or the office assistants

The ladies on the staff . . . . .The women on the staff  
. . . . .(use ladies only to parallel gentlemen)

Women's libbers. . . . . Feminists or liberationists

### **4. Sex role stereotyping**

Avoid sexist assumptions.

Instead of . . . . . Use

Lecturers and their wives . . . . . Lecturers and their partners

We are looking for an administrator . . . . . We are looking for an administrator with  
who is his own man. . . . . a sense of independence and integrity

### **5. Gender descriptions**

Avoid irrelevant, gratuitous gender descriptions.

Instead of . . . . . Use

a woman doctor . . . . . a doctor

a lady editor . . . . . an editor

a male nurse . . . . . a nurse

When referring to a position, a quality or an action that might apply to either sex, use a sex neutral term. Also, avoid the use of man or of composite words involving the syllable, -man, which imply the term is exclusively male.

Instead of . . . . . Use

air hostess . . . . . flight attendant

alderman . . . . . councillor/council member

the average man/the common man . . . . . the average person/ordinary people/people in general

businessman. . . . . executive/business executive

chairman . . . . . chair/convenor/mediator/coordinator/president

craftsman . . . . . artisan/craftsperson

draughtsman. . . . . draughter

fireman . . . . . firefighter

foreman . . . . . supervisor

founding fathers . . . . . founders/ancestors/forebears/first fleeters

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