

Should the singular form be essential in the context, "his/her" should be used.

Use	Avoid
Machinists are responsible for their work areas.	The machinist is responsible for his work area.
Taxpayers should check with the post office to obtain the required forms.	The taxpayer should check with his post office to obtain the forms he needs.
Children have the need for improved self-concept.	The child has a need for his self-concept to be improved.
Each student must submit his/her report by Tuesday. or Students must submit their reports by Tuesday.	Each student must submit his report by Tuesday.
Close contact with the President is maintained by the Chief Negotiator.	The Chief Negotiator works closely with his President.

### Correspondence







The simplest way to eliminate sexist written communication in correspondence is to use first and last names for both women and men. When the sex of the person is unclear, use the entire name.

Use	Avoid
Anna and John Smith Dear Customers:	Mr. & Mrs. John Smith Dear Customers
Dr. Paula Brown Dear Dr. Brown:	Dr. P. Brown Dear Sir:
G.H. Maki Dear G.H. Maki:	G.H. Maki Dear Sir:
Dr. Louise Sten	Mrs. Louise Sten, PhD

### Signatures

In signing correspondence, individuals should sign first and last names.

If initials or a sex neutral name are used, the writer should include Mr. or Ms in parentheses in the typewritten signature line.

Use	Avoid
Sincerely,  Marie Gose	Sincerely,  (Ms) Marie Gose
Yours truly,  (Mr.) Dale Welby	Yours truly,  Cordially,
Cordially,  (Ms) L.J. Graham	Cordially, 

Educators should be particularly sensitive when addressing form letters or notices to parents/guardians in the school community. School communications should not assume that two parents are being addressed, nor that only parents are being addressed.

Use	Avoid
Dear Friends and Relatives of Prince Charles Students	Dear Moms and Dads
Friends and Neighbours	Dear Parents

## Conclusion

Academic leaders have a special responsibility to model inclusive language until it becomes the norm. Federal and provincial government guidelines have been used for the past several years to ensure nonsexist language in government publications. Many publishers now require authors to write in a nonsexist way and newspaper and magazine writers use inclusive language in advertisements as well as articles. The Ontario Ministry of Education provides the following guideline for the eligibility of materials to be included in *Circular 14 Textbooks*:

*"The materials must be free from racial, national or ethnic, religious, cultural or sex bias or bias towards the aged, the handicapped, persons in certain occupations, or individuals belonging to a specific group."* (p.v)

The learning environment in our modern school systems must provide a supportive climate for the development of all students without the limitations imposed by stereotyping. Contemporary expectations for employment and educational equity require that every educator be a model of egalitarian communication. The government requires it, society expects it and students deserve it.

### References

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- Sorels, Bobbye D. *The Nonsexist Communicator, Solving the Problems of Gender and Awkwardness in Modern English*. New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983.
- Treasury Board Canada. *Administrative Policy Manual, Chapter 484, Elimination of Sexual Stereotyping*. Sept. 1982.

# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

## A Sex Equity Issue

Language is the exposed edge of thought



## The Issue

Throughout history, language has been recognized as an extremely powerful tool. Whether we consider influential speakers and leaders or the influence of language in the print media, we are all aware of the “power of language.”

*It is impossible to think that we would not change language that “has outgrown its usefulness.”*

*Moving toward inclusive language is a small, but absolutely necessary step in encouraging the full human development of both sexes. And the payoffs are enormous: we assure justice and equal treatment to all in a country that prizes equality; we clarify fuzzy, illogical, and unrealistic thinking; and our writing becomes more sharply expressive and dynamic.*

Maggio, R.  
*The Nonsexist Word Finder*

The issue for educators is how to ensure that the language we use and model for students is an accurate reflection of today’s reality so that the representation of the world developed by young people and portrayed by the educational system is appropriate.

## What’s the problem?

Many word forms and expressions have developed over time under the influence of outdated assumptions about the roles of men and women in society, and some remain in use because little effort has been addressed to altering our language to reflect modern circumstances. Simply stated, the use of exclusive or sexist language precasts either females or males into roles on the basis of sex alone. Conversely, inclusive or nonsexist language does not precast either females or males into roles on the basis of sex alone.

## Why change?

- In the past, society virtually restricted males and females to certain roles, but such restrictions no longer exist. Therefore, communication symbols based on past roles do not portray current circumstances properly. Instead, they distort reality.
- The use of the words “man” and “mankind” as a so-called generic term to refer to all people creates confusion and tends to exclude half the human experience from discussion.
- Communication tools are constantly being amended and adapted to serve the need for contemporary conversational usage. When the tools no longer serve that need, they are changed. Sexist language does not serve people’s needs.

- Modern linguists and educators must not perpetuate a language that portrays males as the norm and females as the abnormal or “other.”
- Equal treatment of men and women in our society requires communication symbols which value all human beings equally.
- Exclusive (sexist) language often creates the perception that girls or women can’t or shouldn’t do certain things. As this message becomes a prophecy, the consequent loss of the potential contribution of women is a loss society cannot afford.
- Exclusive language can contribute to discriminatory practices.
- Inclusive (nonsexist) language can be natural, graceful and grammatically correct.

## How do we change?

The following general guidelines for nonsexist communication delineate rules, attitudes and commitment:

- Commit yourself to remove sexism from all your communications.
- Practise and reinforce inclusive language patterns until they become habitual.
- Set a nonsexist communication example and direct or persuade others to adopt your example.
- Use the full range of techniques to correct sexist language, including reconstruction, substitution and deletion.
- Ensure that all school board and school communications such as newsletters, collective agreements, correspondence and presentations use inclusive language.
- Check every outgoing message — written, oral or visual — for sexism before sending it.

### Nouns

Usually, naming an individual accurately eliminates most sexist references.

Use	Avoid
chairperson	chairman
president	
parliamentarian	
salesperson	salesman
clerk, dealer	
officer	policeman
letter carrier	postman
worker	workman
workforce	manpower
weather forecaster	weatherman
astronaut	spaceman
first-year student	freshman
manager, accountant, secretary, clerk, receptionist, etc.	the “girls” in the office

Further, naming objects appropriately eliminates a number of additional examples:

Use	Avoid
sewer cover	manhole cover
synthetic fabric	manmade fabric
history, our heritage	the history of man
a staffed observatory	a manned observatory

### Pronouns

The most frequent use of exclusive language occurs when a nonsexist noun is followed by a gender related pronoun. The easiest form of amendment is to put all nouns