

Inclusive Writing: Part II

While it's easy to say that writing should be more inclusive, actually picking the right terminology can be difficult. This handout will take a look at methods as well as specific examples that can help approach inclusive writing. The aim of inclusive language is to show respect for individual differences, cultures, and experiences. To respect our diverse community, writing with inclusivity can allow us to treat everyone with humanity and equality.

Avoid Gender Bias

Without knowing someone's gender or pronouns, we should avoid using gendered nouns.

- **Say** "Each group member should submit their project."
- **Not** "Each group member should submit his or her project."

If a person does not identify with "he" or "she," then use the singular "they."

* Unfortunately, some formatting guides still discourage use of the singular "they." If a guide you're using specifies that you should not use "they" as a singular, you have a few options. You can use plurals throughout (to avoid "he" or "she"), omit the pronouns entirely, or rewrite the sentence completely.

Avoid Gender-Paired Words

There are some words that use a binary of either "man" or "woman" to describe individuals. These terms are called gender pairs, and we should try to avoid them. Frequently, words that have man/woman or use an "-ss" ending to indicate feminine words can be gender paired. Here are examples of gendered pairs and a more inclusive counterpart.

- *Instead* of waiter/waitress, use server.
- *Instead* of a steward/stewardess, use flight attendant.
- *Instead* of the landlord/lady, use property owner.
- *Instead* of policeman/woman, use police officer.
- *Instead* of mankind, use humankind.

Use Person-First Language

Refer to a person first, rather than categorizing them by a characteristic. Explain the characteristic as it relates to the person.

- It would be preferred to **say** “person with albinism.”
 - **Not** “an albino”
- It would be preferred to **say** “person with a disability.”
 - **Not** “a disabled person.”

Using a term to describe someone demeans them as a person. Making their condition/disability the center of their description carries a negative connotation. People are multifaceted individuals, and thus it can be offensive to box their individuality into one term. Therefore, we should describe them as a person first, followed by their description.

Avoid Referring to People by Their Demographics

When addressing people, it's preferred to do so neutrally or through a job title.

- **Say** “Dear Colleague” or “Dear Customer Service Manager.”
 - **Not** “Dear Sir or Madam”
- **Say** “people, everyone, friends”
 - **Not** “dudes, guys, or girls and boys.”

This principle once again demonstrates the impact of referring to people by their “assumed” gender/identity. Instead of using terms with gender, we can refer to a group or individual with a gender-neutral alternative.

Use Current Terminology about Race, Culture, and Gender

As a general rule of thumb, we should always make sure to ask people what words they use to describe themselves. Avoid making “educated guesses” about one’s identity if it isn’t explicitly stated. Moreover, it's important to recognize that “current terminology” can evolve with time. Keeping apprised of current terminology is needed due to language’s ability to adapt.

A key way to use current terminology is to avoid confusing origin with someone's identity. For example, people of African origin who are from Germany are not African American, and people from the Middle East may not be Arabian. Always make sure to clarify before using identifying words. Moreover, this means to not generalize or make assumptions about a person's identity before describing them.

Additionally, when talking about individuals who are marginalized, consider the following.

- **Say** “*underrepresented or marginalized group.*”
 - **Not** “minority”

Minority tends to refer to the number of people in a group. An individual or group can be marginalized even if they aren't a minority.

Another common example is when talking about one's sexual orientation:

- **Say** “*sexual orientation.*”
 - **Not** “*sexual preference*”

The word “preference” indicates that one has a choice about their sexuality (i.e., it's not part of their identity—just a preference). Therefore, “sexual orientation” is a more accurate phrase.

Additionally, when referring to a person with respect, consider the following.

- **Say** “Mx. or *Ms.*”
 - **Not** “*Miss* or *Mrs.*”

“Mx.” is a gender-neutral way of referring to someone, so it can be used instead of “Mr.” as well. Once again, we should avoid gender and/or identity assumptions. “Mx.” is becoming a more popular way of referring to a person with respect.

Using the outdated “Miss” or “Mrs.” when addressing a recipient assumes a woman's marital status, which is irrelevant and potentially offensive. To avoid assumptions (and if we know their pronouns), we can use “Ms.” as an alternative. Also note that there are other methods you can use to address someone with respect; for example, when writing to a professor, you can address them by that title (“Professor”) or as “Dr.” if they have a doctoral degree.

Activity 1: Identify and Suggest Inclusive Language

Read the sentences below carefully and identify any non-inclusive words/phrases. Once identified, make a suggestion for a word/phrase using inclusive writing.

1. An albino gave a presentation to the class yesterday.
2. The professor asked each student to turn in his or her projects on the front table.
3. The stewardess gave us peanuts as a snack during the flight.
4. The waitress did a great job of delivering the food quickly.
5. Aren't they part of a minority?
6. If you're comfortable answering, I was wondering what your sexual preference is?
7. The landlord had requested that they pay their rent on time.
8. This college needs to make more accessibility accommodations for disabled people.
9. Hello Mrs. Johnson, can you please let me know your preferred pronouns?

Answer Key for Activity

1. *A person with albinism* gave a presentation to the class yesterday.
2. The professor asked each student to turn in *their* projects on the front table.
3. The *flight attendant* gave us peanuts as a snack during the flight.
4. The server did a great job of delivering the food quickly.
5. Aren't they part of a *marginalized group*?
6. If you're comfortable answering, I was wondering what your *sexual orientation* is?
7. The *property owner* had requested that they pay their rent on time.
8. This college needs to make more accessibility accommodations for *people with disabilities*.
9. Hello *Mx. Johnson*, can you please let me know your preferred pronouns?

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