



## Non-Sexist Language

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The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) suggests the following guidelines:

### Generic Use

Although MAN in its original sense carried the dual meaning of adult human and adult male, its meaning has come to be so closely identified with adult male that the generic use of MAN and other words with masculine markers should be avoided.

#### Examples

mankind  
man's achievements  
man-made  
the common man  
man the stockroom  
nine man-hours

#### Alternatives

humanity, people, human beings  
human achievements  
synthetic, manufactured, machine-made  
the average person, ordinary people  
staff the stockroom  
nine staff-hours

### Occupations

Avoid the use of MAN in occupational terms when persons holding the job could be either male or female.

#### Examples

chairman  
  
businessman  
fireman  
mailman  
steward and stewardess  
policeman and policewoman  
congressman

#### Alternatives

coordinator (of a committee or department), moderator (of a meeting), presiding officer, head, chair  
business executive  
firefighter  
mail carrier  
flight attendant  
police officer  
congressional representative

### Pronouns

Because English has no generic singular--or common-sex--pronoun, we have used HE, HIS, and HIM in such expressions as "the student needs HIS pencil." When we constantly personify "the judge," "the critic," "the executive," "the author," and so forth, as male by using the pronoun HE, we are subtly conditioning ourselves against the idea of a female judge, critic, executive, or author. There are several alternative approaches for ending the exclusion of women that results from the pervasive use of masculine pronouns.

#### a. Recast into the plural.

##### Example

Give each student his paper as soon as he is finished.

##### Alternative

Give students their papers as soon as they are finished.

#### b. Reword to eliminate gender problems.

##### Example

The average student is worried about his grade.

##### Alternative

The average student is worried about grades.

#### c. Replace the masculine pronoun with ONE, YOU, or (sparingly) HE OR SHE, as appropriate.

**Example**

If the student was satisfied with his performance on the pretest, he took the post-test.

**Alternative**

A student who was satisfied with her or his performance on the pretest took the post-test.

#### **d. Alternate male and female examples and expressions. (Be careful not to confuse the reader.)**

**Example**

Let each student participate. Has he had a chance to talk? Could he feel left out?

**Alternative**

Let each student participate. Has she had a chance to talk? Could he feel left out?

### **Indefinite Pronouns**

Using the masculine pronouns to refer to an indefinite pronoun (everybody, everyone, anybody, anyone) also has the effect of excluding women. In all but strictly formal uses, plural pronouns have become acceptable substitutes for the masculine singular.

**Example**

Anyone who wants to go to the game should bring his money tomorrow.

**Alternative**

Anyone who wants to go to the game should bring their money tomorrow.

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