



# Using Non-Sexist Language

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

## Pronouns

Language is powerful. It reveals its respective society's importance of certain people or groups based on how or how often it represents them in its vocabulary and usage. 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," as male by using the pronoun HE, we subtly condition ourselves to see the male gender as default. By adhering to this default, we reproduce two harmful habits. First, we reinforce the concept of a gender binary, with only two extreme options and their societal expectations. Second, we diminish the representation—and therefore, the importance—of any other gender, including (but not limited to) female, gender fluid, agender, etc... There are several alternative approaches for ending the exclusion and limitation of multiple genders that results from the pervasive use of masculine pronouns.

### 1. 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.

### 2. Reword to remove gender pronouns altogether

#### Example

The average student is worried about his grade.

#### Alternative

The average student is worried about grades.

### 3. Use ONE. This sounds very formal and should be used cautiously.

#### Example

If one is satisfied with one's performance on the pretest, then the next step is taking the post-test.

#### Alternative

If a student is satisfied with their performance on the pretest, then the next step is taking the post-test.

### 4. Alternate male and female examples and expressions (but only if the examples have clearly signaled themselves to belong to one of those genders. Otherwise, it may be best to stick to the plural). 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?

**(OVER)**

## Indefinite Pronouns

Using the masculine pronouns HE or HIM to refer to an indefinite pronoun (everybody, everyone, anybody, and anyone) also has the effect of excluding women and non-binary genders. In all but formal and traditional 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.

## Generic Use

Although MAN in its original sense carried the dual meaning of adult human and adult male, its meaning has come to be primarily identified with adult male; therefore, the generic use of MAN and other words with masculine markers should be avoided, to prevent representing all people under the male gender.

### Examples

mankind  
man's achievements  
manmade  
the common man  
man the stockroom

### Alternatives

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

## Occupations

Avoid the use of MAN in occupational terms when persons holding the job could be either male or female. This correction avoids the connotation that the male gender is the default for these jobs or positions of authority.

### 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