Using Bias-free Language

Bias-free language is language that is sensitive to people's sex, race, age, physical condition and many other categories. Bias-free language does not discriminate and therefore includes all readers in a fair and friendly manner.

Avoiding Sexism

Use gender parallelism: use the word *woman* in the context where you would use *man*, *lady* where you would use *gentleman*, and *girl* where you would use *boy*.

> Biased: I gave my name to the girl at the main desk.
> Better: I gave my name to the woman at the main desk.

Use appropriate pronouns when referring to people that may be either male or female.

> Biased: Each manager must debrief his department.
> Better: Each manager must debrief his or her department.

Replace gender-biased terms such as salesman and foreman with bias-free terms.

> Biased: Give your report to the committee chairman.
> Better: Give your report to the committee chair.

Avoiding Racism and Ageism

Mention a person's race or age only if it is relevant to the story.

> Biased: A strange Black man spoke to me at the grocery store.
> Better: A strange man spoke to me at the grocery store.

Be aware of preferred group terms.

> Biased: The bus of Oriental senior citizens took a detour.
> Better (only if the age and race are relevant): The bus of older Asian adults took a detour.

Disability and Disease

Focus on people rather than conditions.

> Biased: I met an epileptic on the bus today.
> Better: I met a person with epilepsy on the bus today.

*These principles are taken from Business and Administrative Communication (seventh edition) by Kitty O. Locker, which is available for your use at the Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors.