

# Bias-free Language

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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 Asian older 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.