



ELIMINATING SEXIST LANGUAGE

Sexist language may offend readers, so it should be avoided. Sexist language happens intentionally or unintentionally when you use a gender specific pronoun (like he or she) to refer to people of both genders.

Example:

When **a doctor** prescribes medicine, **he** should consider past medical problems.

Doctors can be either male or female. This sentence assumes that all doctors are male. To avoid sexist language, you can use both pronouns or change the subject from singular to plural.

Examples:

When a doctor prescribes medicine, he or she should consider past medical problems.

When doctors prescribe medicine, they should consider past medical problems.

Be careful to also avoid a pronoun agreement problem. This can happen if you use a plural pronoun (such as they or them) and forget to make the subject plural.

Sexist language can also occur if you use “man” to describe all people in a sentence.

Examples:

Mankind is often destructive to the environment. (The term “humankind” is a better choice because it includes everyone.)

Men are higher on the food chain than slugs. (The terms “people” or “humans” are a better choice because it doesn’t exclude women.)

Firemen must always look after their co-workers (The term “firefighters” includes both men and women.)

Tip: It is not sexist language if you use a gender specific pronoun when you know the gender of the person you are writing about.

