Gender-sensitive Communication

Naming conventions

Traditional titles for women, Mrs (married) or Miss (single), used to refer to their marital status, whereas the term for men, Mr, was neutral in this regard (either married or single). This naming convention signals a woman's relationship to a man within her name, inviting the hearer to consider this as part of who she is, rather than presenting her as an individual. The term Ms avoids this, which, like Mr, does not denote marital status.

> When referring to women you should generally use the term Ms (which does not denote marital status).

Another point to look out for in writing is referencing. When referring to a woman, use the same conventions as you would when referring to a man. Using a first name to refer to a woman when you have used a surname for a man indicates a lack of respect for the woman in comparison to the man.

> Always use the same naming conventions for men and women.

Sometimes people refer to women in relation to men. Avoid doing this by ensuring that you are always referring to women as people in their own right.

Tip: The term 'maiden name' and 'married name' reflect the tradition of women changing their names to match their husband 's and make relationship status an integral part of a women's name. Instead just refer to someone's 'last name'

Examples

Gender-discriminatory language

Mr and Mrs Alistair Farrar will be attending this evening.

Gender-sensitive language

Jessica Farrar and Alistair Farrar will be attending this evening.

Gender-discriminatory language

Yang and his research assistant Holly were pioneering social researchers.

Gender-sensitive language

Yang and his research assistant Smith were pioneering social researchers.

Tip: Some women may choose to refer to themselves using Miss or Mrs. If someone refers to themselves in this way, you should use the same title when referring to her.