

Gender-sensitive Communication

Avoid gendered pronouns (he or she) when the person's gender is unknown

When using a gendered pronoun (e.g. he or she), the speaker is assuming the gender of the person they are talking about. Often people use gendered pronouns even when they do not know the gender of the person they are talking about or when talking about a group of people that could be of either gender.

This practice perpetuates **gender stereotyping** by repeating commonly held expectations about the gender of people in certain roles.

Instead you should use gender-neutral language. A common way to do this is to use the plural 'they'. This is becoming more and more common in standard English.

Examples

Gender-insensitive language

The number of years an electrician will spend training depends on what country he is from.

Gender-neutral language

The number of years an electrician will spend training depends on what country they are from.

Gender-insensitive language

Every nurse should take care of her own uniform and cover the expense herself.

Gender-sensitive language

*Every nurse should take care of his or her own uniform and cover the expense themselves.
Your boss needs to know he can rely on you.*



Jacob Lund, The gender of my boss, Shutterstock

But my boss is a woman...

Tip: Do not rely on “he/him/man” when talking about an individual in the abstract – this excludes women from the conversation.

Gendered pronouns come in a few forms (he or she, hers or his, himself or herself, her and him).