

Gender-sensitive Communication

Patronising language

One example of trivialisation is the additions of diminutive affixes to denote that the referent is female. Gender-sensitive writers should avoid these expressions as they can trivialise women.

Example

Gender-discriminatory language

The usherette helped me to my seat just as the actress came on stage.

Gender-sensitive language

The usher helped me to my seat just as the actor came on stage.

Tip: Think about the meaning of the words kitchenette and novelette compared to the words kitchen and novel to see the effect of the –ette suffix.

Language which refers to people unknown to you in terms of endearment ('My dear', 'Darling', 'Love', and 'Dear' when used in speech) is patronising, condescending and promotes trivialisation. These forms should not be used unless the interlocutor has a close relationship with the speaker.

- Another common way of trivialising women is to refer to adult women as 'girls'. This is patronising and should be avoided.
- Additionally, sometimes the word 'woman' is used dismissively e.g. 'Get out of my way, woman!'
- As well as avoiding obvious gender insults you should take care to avoid patronising women using more innocuous terms.

Example

Gender-discriminatory language

I'll get one of the girls from my office to help me move the boxes.

Gender-neutral/sensitive language

I'll get one of the gang from my office to help me move the boxes.

Or

I'll get one of the women from my office to help me move the boxes.