Gender-sensitive Communication

Common challenges when using gender-sensitive language

This section presents the most common stumbling blocks when trying to write in a gender-sensitive manner. It is designed to help you understand the issues which lead to language being gender-discriminatory so that you can recognise gender-discriminatory language when it occurs.

Tip: The Practical Tools section contains a table of solutions to help you use gender-sensitive language on a day-to-day basis.

Categories of gender-discriminatory language

There are three broad categories under which much gender-discriminatory language falls:

1. Stereotypes: assigning gender when gender is unknown or irrelevant as a result of stereotypes
2. Invisibility and omission: language which casts the male as the generic norm and keeps women from being visible in public life.
3. Subordination and trivialisation: language which paints one gender, often women, as inferior, or belittles them.

These three categories are very closely related. In fact, invisibility, omission, subordination and trivialisation stem from gender stereotypes and can reflect attitudes held across society.

Tip: Always ask yourself if what you are saying could fall into any of these categories – if so, think of a different way to express yourself.

Non-linguistic communication
There are many ways of communicating and we include some reference to other forms of visual communication, such as images and emojis.