

## GENDER EQUALITY GUIDELINES FOR UNESCO PUBLICATIONS

### Annex 4: Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language

The representatives of Canada and the Nordic countries at UNESCO raised the issue of sexist language for the first time at the 24th session of the General Conference, in 1987. A call was made for the avoidance of gender-specific language in UNESCO, and the General Conference adopted a resolution dealing with this issue.<sup>1</sup> The General Conference went on to adopt an increasingly firm stance on the issue at its 25th (1989), 26th (1991) and 28th (1995) sessions.<sup>2</sup> This development indicated a growing awareness that language does not merely reflect the way we think: it also shapes our thinking. If words and expressions that imply that women are inferior to men are constantly used, that assumption of inferiority tends to become part of our mindset; hence the need to adjust our language when our ideas evolve.

There is a tendency to use ‘gender’ as a synonym for ‘women’. Care should be taken to consider what is really meant. ‘Gender’ is in danger of becoming such a vogue word that it is overstretched and virtually meaningless. This would be unfortunate, both for the sake of language and for the cause of sexual and gender equality. With some rephrasing and careful attention to meaning, it is usually possible to improve accuracy. Where different genders are meant, it is always preferable to use a term that includes, or at least does not exclude, women. Further details can be found in UNESCO’s Guidelines on Gender Neutral Language, available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001149/114950mo.pdf>

The underlying principle of gender-inclusive language is that in all communications women and men are equal and should be treated and respected equally. In language, this equality takes the form of overall gender balance, parallel word choices for both men and women, and elimination of terms that stereotype, exclude, or demean women.

The following paragraphs propose alternatives for most commonly used discriminatory terms and concepts.

Description	Avoid	Do use
<b>Stereotypes</b> are generalized and fixed images of people belonging to a particular group formed by isolating or exaggerating certain features,	1) Do not refer to adult women as <i>girls</i> , <i>gals</i> or <i>ladies</i> . 2) The term <i>girl</i> is never appropriate in the workplace.	1) <i>Woman/women</i> is the word that corresponds to <i>man/men</i> 2) Unless when relevant, i.e. when referring to a minor, or a child, e.g. “Parents should be

<sup>1</sup> 24 C/Resolution 14.1 invites the Director-General ‘to adopt a policy related to the drafting of all of the Organization’s working documents aimed at avoiding, to the extent possible, the use of language which refers explicitly or implicitly to only one sex except where positive measures are being considered’.

<sup>2</sup> 25 C/Resolution 109, 26 C/Resolution 11.1 and 28 C/Resolution 1.13.

<p>or by oversimplifying and underestimate individuals' distinct identities.</p>	<p>3) Do not use <i>lady, woman or female</i> as adjectives (e.g. <i>lady receptionist, woman director, woman driver</i>).</p> <p>4) Do not use <i>female</i> as a noun (e.g. "Our new programme officer is a <i>female</i>").</p> <p>5) Avoid using terms that make irrelevant assumptions about how women think or look (e.g. <i>feminine intuition, the fair sex, the weaker sex, the little woman, masculine drive, women's work</i>, or adjectives such as <i>lady-like, man-like, womanly and manly</i>).</p> <p>6) Avoid words and phrases that make any other assumptions about gender. For example, the phrase "Conference delegates and their wives are invited to attend the breakfast meeting" assumes that it is normal that all delegates are men and their spouses are women.</p>	<p>encouraged to enroll <i>girls</i> in secondary education".</p> <p>3) Unless the gender is relevant in the context (e.g. "There are nowadays <i>women director-generals</i> in 3 UN specialized agencies out of 19").</p> <p>4) Except in technical writing, such as sociological studies, medical data, and when the corresponding word would be <i>male</i> (e.g. "In my Division there are six <i>females</i> and one <i>male</i>").</p> <p>5) These adjectives have many connotations, depending on one's perception of such qualities. Choose adjectives that apply to both women and men and say exactly what you intend to say (e.g. <i>elegant, well-mannered, strong or courageous</i>).</p> <p>6) Use neutral terms, such as <i>spouse</i>. Thus, the phrase "Conference delegates and their <i>spouses</i> are invited to attend the breakfast meeting" does not contain any assumption related to the gender of the delegates nor of their spouses.</p>
<p><b>False generics:</b> Generics are nouns and pronouns intended to be used for both women and men. Linguistically, however, some generics are male-specific, which excludes women and creates ambiguity. The word <i>man</i> is generically used to mean human being or person, but it makes women quite invisible in language and leads to their portrayal as deviations from this '<i>male = human</i>' norm. This should be avoided by using gender-neutral and gender-inclusive</p>	<p>1) <i>Man, Men or Mankind</i></p> <p>2) <i>Man of letters/science</i></p> <p>3) <i>The origin of man</i></p> <p>4) <i>Early man, primitive man</i></p> <p>5) <i>Ancient man</i></p> <p>6) <i>Man-sized job</i></p> <p>7) <i>Brotherhood (of man)</i></p>	<p>1) <i>Person(s); Human(s); Individual(s); Human race/beings/species; People(s); Humanity; Women and men or Men and women; Humankind</i></p> <p>2) <i>Scholar, academic, writer, author, critic, scientist</i></p> <p>3) <i>The origin of humanity</i></p> <p>4) <i>Early peoples; Primitive humans</i></p> <p>5) <i>Ancient people/civilization</i></p> <p>6) <i>Demanding task, Big job</i></p>

<p>generics, thus ensuring that women are included and represented fairly in writing and conversation.</p>	<p>8) <i>Forefathers</i> 9) <i>Fatherland</i></p>	<p>7) <i>Humanity (bond of), Human family, Global community</i> 8) <i>Ancestors, Forbears</i> 9) <i>Homeland</i></p>
<p><b>Man-compounds:</b> The word <i>man</i> also occurs in compounds as a prefix, or as a suffix.</p>	<p>1) <i>Manmade</i> 2) <i>Manpower</i> 3) <i>Man table</i> 4) <i>Workmanlike</i> 5) <i>Man-days / hours</i></p>	<p>1) <i>Handmade, Handcrafted, , Manufactured,</i> 2) <i>Human resources, Labour force, Workforce, Personnel</i> 3) <i>Staffing table, Staffing</i> 4) <i>Skillful, Efficient</i> 5) <i>Worker-days / hours</i></p>
<p><b>Occupational titles:</b> The suffix <i>-man</i> is used frequently in occupational titles and related designations. Occupational terms or job titles often convey assumed gender or class norms through the inclusion of irrelevant details and gender modifiers. Titles that convey identity modifiers can be altered in a number of different ways to remove specification.</p>	<p>1) <i>Businessman</i>  2) <i>Chairman</i> 3) <i>Spokesman</i> 4) <i>Master of ceremonies</i> 5) <i>Cameraman</i> 6) <i>Clergyman</i> 7) <i>Draftsman</i> 8) <i>Fireman</i> 9) <i>Fisherman</i>  10) <i>Foreman</i> 11) <i>Handyman</i> 12) <i>Mailman</i> 13) <i>Middleman</i>  14) <i>Newsman</i> 15) <i>Policeman</i>  16) <i>Repairman</i> 17) <i>Salesman</i></p>	<p>1) <i>Businessperson (Businessman and Businesswoman is appropriate if gender is relevant in the context and if used gender-fairly - i.e. an equal number of times for each expression in the text).</i> 2) <i>Chair, Head, Convener, Chairperson</i> 3) <i>Spokesperson</i> 4) <i>Compere</i> 5) <i>Camera operator</i> 6) <i>Cleric</i> 7) <i>Drafter; Draftsperson</i> 8) <i>Firefighter</i> 9) <i>Fisher; (Fisherwoman and Fisherman)</i> 10) <i>Supervisor; Chief; Lead</i> 11) <i>Caretaker</i> 12) <i>Postal carrier; Letter carrier</i> 13) <i>Go-between; Intermediary; Facilitator</i> 14) <i>Reporter; Journalist</i> 15) <i>Police officer (Policeman or Policewoman)</i> 16) <i>Repairer; Technician</i> 17) <i>Sales clerk; Sales representative; Salesperson</i></p>

	<p>18) <i>Sportsman</i></p> <p>19) <i>Tradesman</i></p> <p>20) <i>Watchman</i></p> <p>21) <i>Workman</i></p> <p>22) <i>Cleaning lady</i></p> <p>23) <i>Headmaster, Headmistress</i></p> <p>24) <i>Matron</i></p> <p>25) <i>Housewife</i></p>	<p>18) <i>Athlete; Sports enthusiast; (Sportsman or Sportswoman)</i></p> <p>19) <i>Tradesperson (Tradeswoman or Tradesman)</i></p> <p>20) <i>Watch; Security guard</i></p> <p>21) <i>Worker</i></p> <p>22) <i>Cleaner</i></p> <p>23) <i>Principal</i></p> <p>24) <i>Director of nursing</i></p> <p>25) <i>Homemaker</i></p>
<p><b>Feminine suffixes:</b> The addition of the feminine suffixes in job titles, such as <i>-ess, -ette, and -trix</i>, reinforces the notion that generic nouns are male, while female nouns are something less, or at least different. Generic nouns should be used for both women and men</p>	<p>1) <i>Actress</i></p> <p>2) <i>Aviatrix</i></p> <p>3) <i>Executrix</i></p> <p>4) <i>Manageress</i></p> <p>5) <i>Sculptress</i></p> <p>6) <i>Stewardess</i></p> <p>7) <i>Usherette</i></p> <p>8) <i>Waitress</i></p>	<p>1) <i>Actor</i></p> <p>2) <i>Aviator</i></p> <p>3) <i>Executor</i></p> <p>4) <i>Manager</i></p> <p>5) <i>Sculptor</i></p> <p>6) <i>Flight attendant</i></p> <p>7) <i>Usher</i></p> <p>8) <i>Waiter, Server</i></p>
<p><b>False generics “he, him, his”:</b> The expressions <i>‘she or he’</i>, or <i>‘s/he’</i> have long been acceptable substitutes for false generic <i>‘he’</i>. Used sparingly, <i>‘she or he’</i>, or <i>‘s/he’</i> could be very helpful solutions. However, although these forms provide a quick solution, some readers might find them awkward or interruptive if overused. Other useful techniques to avoid the overuse of <i>‘she or he’</i>, or <i>‘s/he’</i>, depending of the context, could be the use of some other gender inclusive synonym, the use of <i>‘they, them, their’</i>, <i>‘you, your’</i>, and <i>‘one’</i>, or simply by eliminating personal pronouns.</p> <p><b>Disclaimers:</b> Some writers choose to preface their use of false generics with an acknowledgment of the generic usage. However, it is advisable to avoid this technique to the</p>	<p><i>‘He, his him’</i></p> <p>1) “A candidate must satisfy the recruitment panel that <i>he</i> has adequate qualifications”</p> <p>2) “Every specialized agency of the United Nations has an executive director. <i>He</i> is responsible for the administration of the agency”</p> <p>3) “Each Chief of Section should ensure that <i>he</i> attends the meeting”</p> <p>4) “Anyone who wants <i>his</i> performance evaluated should submit the enclosed form completed by 31 March”</p> <p>5) “Each staff member must be sure to renew <i>his</i> entrance badge annually”</p>	<p><i>“She or he’, or ‘s/he ’</i></p> <p>1) “A candidate must satisfy the recruitment panel that <i>she or he (s/he)</i> has adequate qualifications.</p> <p>2) Use a gender-inclusive synonym: “Every specialized agency of the United Nations has an executive director. <i>This official</i> is responsible for the administration of the agency”.</p> <p>3) Use of <i>‘they’</i> as a neutral singular pronoun: “Chiefs of Section should ensure that <i>they</i> attend the meeting”.</p> <p>4) Use of <i>‘they, their and them’</i> after indefinite pronouns: “Anyone who wants <i>their</i> performance evaluated should submit the enclosed form completed by 31 March”.</p> <p>5) Use <i>‘you’</i> and <i>‘your’</i>: “Be sure to renew <i>your</i> entrance badge annually”.</p>

<p>extent possible, since it may suggest that there is recognition of unavailability of the man-specific terms and the value system attached to them.</p>	<p>6) "A project manager should require an estimate before <i>he</i> hires a consultant".</p> <p>7) "Each applicant must submit <i>his</i> resume"</p>	<p>6) Use 'one': "As a project manager, <i>one</i> should require an estimate before hiring a consultant".</p> <p>7) Eliminate personal pronouns: "Each applicant must submit <i>a</i> resume".</p>
<p><b>Symmetric language:</b> When referring to different sexes at the same time use parallel or symmetric language.</p>	<p>1) <i>Men and ladies</i></p> <p>2) <i>Man and wife</i></p> <p>3) <i>Dr. Jim Taylor and his assistant Mary</i></p> <p>4) <i>Mr. Smith and Jane</i></p> <p>5) <i>Ms. Jane Elliott and John Smith</i></p>	<p>1) <i>Men and women, or Women and men</i></p> <p>2) <i>Husband and wife, or Wife and husband</i></p> <p>3) <i>Dr. Jim Taylor and his assistant Mary Jones</i></p> <p>4) <i>Mr. Smith and Ms. Elliott</i></p> <p>5) <i>Jane Elliott and John Smith</i></p>
<p><b>Marital status of women and forms of address - the use of <i>Ms, Mrs, and Miss</i></b></p>	<p>1) Avoid identifying a woman as somebody's wife, widow, mother, grandmother or aunt, unless it is relevant in context and if men are described similarly.</p> <p>2) The use of the conventional titles '<i>Mrs</i>' and '<i>Miss</i>' defines women only in terms of their marital status, i.e. in terms of their relationship to men, whereas men are hardly ever described in terms of their relationship to women.</p>	<p>1) Care should be taken that a woman, like a man, is addressed by the name which she prefers, i.e. as she indicates in her correspondence.</p> <p>2) '<i>Ms</i>' is the only term not linked to marital status of women and is now widely used for both single and married women (the plural form of which is '<i>Mses</i>'). The use of '<i>Ms</i>' is recommended especially when the parallel term '<i>Mr</i>' is applied and when uncertain of the address a woman prefers. However, if a woman has a preference for '<i>Miss</i>' or '<i>Mrs</i>' her wishes should be respected</p>

### ***Other tools on Gender-Inclusive Language***

UN Women Guidelines for Gender Inclusive Language:

English (<http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/gender-inclusive%20language/guidelines-on-gender-inclusive-language-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2129>)

French (<http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/gender-inclusive%20language/guidelines-on-gender-inclusive-language-fr.pdf?la=en&vs=907>)

Spanish (<http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/gender-inclusive%20language/guidelines-on-gender-inclusive-language-es.pdf?la=en&vs=905>)

Arabic (<http://www.un.org/ar/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>)

Chinese (<http://www.un.org/zh/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>)

Russian (<http://www.un.org/ru/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>)

Canadian International Development Agency, 'Gender-Neutral Language' -  
<http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/dept-min/pub/legis/n15.html>

Language Portal of Canada, 'Guidelines for Gender-Neutral Language' -  
<http://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/bien-well/fra-eng/style/nonsexistguidelines-eng.html>

Empire State College - State University of New York, 'Gender-exclusive language: introduction and exercise' -  
[http://www8.esc.edu/esconline/across\\_esc/writerscomplex.nsf/0/564e043922d70d98852569c3006d727e?](http://www8.esc.edu/esconline/across_esc/writerscomplex.nsf/0/564e043922d70d98852569c3006d727e?)

University of North Carolina, USA, 'Gender-Sensitive Language' -  
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/gender.html>

University College Cork, 'Non-Sexist Language: A Guide' -  
<http://www.ucc.ie/equalcom/language.html>

Purdue University, USA, 'Non-Sexist Language' -  
[http://www.hum.utah.edu/communication/classes/1600\\_4/wr7.pdf](http://www.hum.utah.edu/communication/classes/1600_4/wr7.pdf)