

A METACLUSIVE™ GUIDE TO LANGUAGE: GENDERED PHRASES, MISOGYNISTIC LANGUAGE, AND PRINCIPLES TO AVOID BOTH

This is a non-exhaustive list of language used every day that assumes gender and polices gender stereotypes and roles, insults based on gender, and several guiding principles to help keep misogynistic language from creeping into your writing and everyday speech.

| GENDERED PHRASES: | GENDER-NEUTRAL OR INCLUSIVE PHRASES TO USE INSTEAD: |
|---------------------------|--|
| guys, hey guys | folks, folx, friends, people, everyone; hey friends, hey y'all, hey everyone |
| gals, hey gals | folks, folx, friends, people, everyone; hey friends, hey y'all, hey everyone |
| ladies and gentlemen | friends, folks, folx, comrades, guests, colleagues, y'all, humans, allies, people, collaborators, companions, partners, associates, patrons, all assembled, or use the role of the audience (students, guests, shoppers, doctors...) |
| Dear Sir or Madam | Dear Editor, Dear Members of the Search Committee, To Whom it May Concern |
| men and women | everyone |
| man, woman | person, individual, employee, coworker, colleague |
| his or hers | theirs |
| hello ladies | hello y'all, hello everyone |
| dude, bro, brother | do not use in a business or work context, unless, of course, you are actually talking to your brother |
| boyfriend, girlfriend | partner, significant other |
| husband, wife | spouse, partner, significant other |
| man the table/booth/event | staff the table, attend, take care of |
| man-hours | staff hours |
| manmade | machine-made, artificial, fake, synthetic |

GENDERED PHRASES, MISOGYNISTIC LANGUAGE, AND PRINCIPLES TO AVOID BOTH

| GENDERED PHRASES: | GENDER-NEUTRAL OR INCLUSIVE PHRASES TO USE INSTEAD: |
|--------------------------|--|
| he or she, him or her | they, them |
| mankind | humankind, people, human beings, humanity |
| the common man, everyman | the average person, everyday employee |
| manpower | workforce, labor, employees, staff |
| middleman, middle guy | intermediary, interloper, in the middle |
| good guy, bad guy | hero, villain |
| himself or herself | themselves |
| girls | don't use this unless referring to women under the age of 18; women, friends |
| Miss. or Mrs. | Ms. (does not imply marital status, defining women by their relationship to men) |
| Mr./Mrs./Ms. Jones | Mx. Jones, Jones, or Attorney/Doctor/Professor Jones (etc.) |
| brother, sister | sibling |
| mother, father | parents |
| mom, dad | parents, family |
| grandmother, grandfather | grandparents |
| aunts, uncles | relatives, family |

GENDERED PHRASES, MISOGYNISTIC LANGUAGE, AND PRINCIPLES TO AVOID BOTH

| GENDERED PHRASES: | GENDER-NEUTRAL OR INCLUSIVE PHRASES TO USE INSTEAD: |
|----------------------------|--|
| male and female | all genders |
| gay or straight | all sexualities |
| can I help you sir, madam? | can I help you? |
| policeman, fireman | police officer, firefighter |
| postman, mailman | postal worker, mail carrier, letter carrier |
| lady athlete | athlete |
| lady doctor | doctor |
| female engineer | engineer |
| male nurse | nurse |
| steward, stewardess | flight attendant |
| actor, actress | actor |
| congressman, woman | legislator, congressperson, congressional representative |
| chairman | chair, chairperson, coordinator, head, leader |

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| GENDERED PHRASES: | GENDER-NEUTRAL OR INCLUSIVE PHRASES TO USE INSTEAD: |
|---|---|
| councilman | council member |
| businessman | businessperson, business professional, executive, leader |
| drama queen | attention seeker, crowd pleaser |
| ninja/rockstar | expert, pro, other more descriptive title |
| assertive | confident |
| office mom | office parent |
| working mother | working parent |
| bossy | fearless, committed |
| seminal | crucial, fundamental, important, pioneering |
| freshman | first-year |
| lady of the house, man of the hour, best man, maid of honor | These phrases are fine if you know that the person you are referring to identifies with the gendered words you are using. |

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INSULTS AND CURSE WORDS ARE FREQUENTLY MISOGYNISTIC:

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|---|---|
| bastard, etc. | saying someone doesn't have a father totally dismisses women, calling someone a female dog, or using female body parts as insults |
| run/throw like a girl, girly girl | "girl" is not a negative, being a girl is not a negative |
| You are such a girl, woman (when said to a man) | implies that the subject is emotional, sensitive, taking too long to get ready or some other characteristic usually associated with women, insulting a gender by calling them a different gender is gender policing |
| dramatic, diva, nag, man-hater, ice queen | insulting women with words that would not be used against men if they acted in the same way |
| mannish, abrasive, ball-buster | negative comments to women who are showing qualities that are traditionally male |
| feisty, supermom, working mother, career woman | patronizing words with no male equivalent (career man?) |
| slut, frigid, easy, tease, cougar, man-eater, prude, man-hater | insult women based on sexuality and sexual expression |
| curvy, cheap frumpy, plus-size model, blonde, mumsy, let herself go, mousey, clotheshorse | sexist words about physical appears with no male equivalent |
| ladylike, bubbly, vivacious, flirty, sassy, chatty, demure, modest | words to praise women for behavior that does not threaten men |
| emotional, hysterical, hormonal, menstrual, flaky, moody, over-sensitive, irrational, neurotic, baby brain, baby weight | dismissing women based on biological assumptions |
| spinster, old maid, school marm, barren, wears the pants, soccer mom, kept woman, trophy wife | defines women by their relationship to men |

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MAKE NOUNS PLURAL TO AVOID PRONOUN ISSUES:

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|---|--|
| A student who is late to his exam will not be admitted. | Using male as default is dismissive, better: Students who are late to their exams will not be admitted. |
| A voter should take care to fill out his or her ballot correctly. | His or her excludes any others, better: Voters should take care to fill out their ballots correctly. |
| Each coach is responsible for his/her team | Slashes are awkward, better: Coaches are responsible for their teams; or The Coach is responsible for her team (if the coach is a woman) |
| Whoever left his or her stuff in the kitchen should collect it | Replace the pronoun with a neutral: Whoever left that stuff in the kitchen should collect it. |
| She might wonder what mistake she made. | One might wonder what one's mistake was. |

REVERSE THE GENDER TO SEE IF THE SENTENCE IS ODD:

| | |
|---|---|
| Women employees must wear skirts. | Men employees must wear skirts. |
| Women should not seek out leadership positions. | Men should not seek out leadership positions. |
| Men babysit their children. | Women babysit their children. |

IS IT NECESSARY TO MENTION GENDER?

| | |
|--|---|
| Select one: <input type="checkbox"/> male <input type="checkbox"/> female <input type="checkbox"/> other | Does their gender matter? Why? If the sentence is still clear without the gendered term, remove it. |
|--|---|

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ADJECTIVES TO AVOID AND THOSE TO USE INSTEAD:

caring, compassionate, hard-working, conscientious, dependable, diligent, dedicated, tactful, interpersonal, warm, helpful

intellectual, insightful, accomplished, successful, reliable, industrious, ambitious, skilled, confident, excellent

TREAT WOMEN AND MEN EQUALLY TO ENSURE GENDER-FAIRNESS AND AVOID STEREOTYPES:

The steward seated Mr. Obama and his lovely wife, Michelle.

The steward seated the Obamas.

The syllabus included Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Hemingway, and Wilde.

The syllabus included Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Ernest Hemingway, and Oscar Wilde (or Morrison, Atwood, Hemingway, and Wilde).

Dear Mothers, please bake cookies for our class party.

Dear Families, please bake cookies for our class party.

Employees are welcome to bring their wives.

Employees are welcome to bring a guest.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT LGBTQ+ INSULTS: FREQUENTLY INSULTS AGAINST THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY ARE RELATED TO THE SUBJECT'S VIOLATION OF GENDER NORMS:

mannish, butch, diesel, bull

Negative descriptors of lesbians based on their rejection of a traditionally female appearance and mannerisms

sissy, flame, queen, fairy, airy-fairy

Negative descriptors of gay men based on their rejection of a traditionally male appearance and mannerisms

That's so gay!

Using the word "gay" to mean stupid or dumb is offensive. Would you say, "That's so Black!" or "That's so disabled!"?

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