



# GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TOOLKIT

# WHY DO WE NEED TO USE GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

Language creates a **mindset**,  
which fosters a **culture**.



Using gender-inclusive language does not  
mean that individuals are 'de-gendered'.

The aim is to ensure that no individual, irrespective of gender orientation and identity, feels excluded by words that are gender-specific or terms and phrases that are socio-culturally associated with a specific gender.

This toolkit can be used for:

- Training of managers, assistants and policy writers
- Verbal communication
  - *Public speaking*
  - *Personal interactions*
- Written communication, e.g. memos, emails
- Policy documents
- Job advertisements

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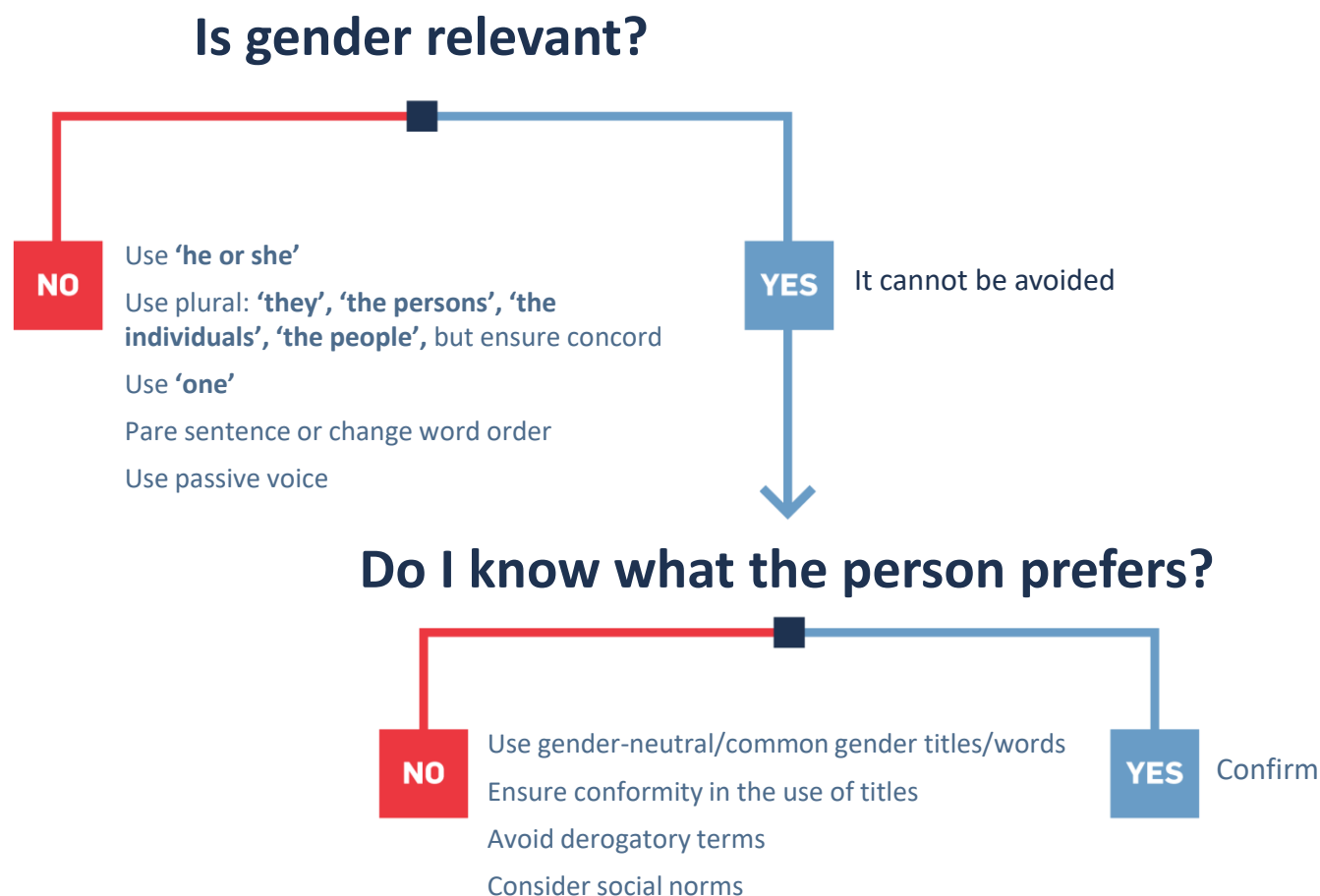
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# INDIVIDUAL WORDS FLOWCHART

This flowchart takes you step by step to a language solution that is gender-inclusive. Ask yourself the question in the flowchart until you reach the strategy that is right for your purposes.

Each step in using the flowchart is explained in the pages to follow.



## IS GENDER RELEVANT?

NO

Gender is irrelevant when the communication is not aimed at a specific person or persons, e.g., a job advertisement.

For the singular, use:

'he or she' or 'he/she', 'the person', 'the individual', 'the incumbent', 'one' (followed by 'who', not 'that')

*Example:*

Cosmo Cheese International is looking for a new **salesman** to service its biggest client sector, the moon region. **He** will be responsible for liaison with the current occupant, Man on the Moon.

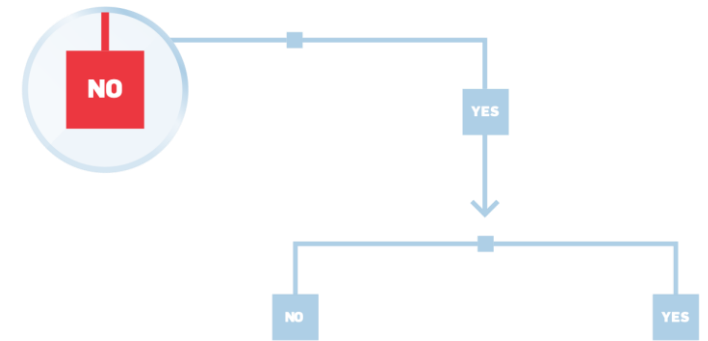


Or use:

'one':

*Example:*

Sylvester said **he** could chase Tweety around the lounge for hours.



Cosmo Cheese International is looking for a new **salesperson** to service our biggest client sector, the moon region. **He or she/The person/The incumbent** will be responsible for liaison with the current occupant, Man on the Moon.



Sylvester said **one** could chase Tweety around the lounge for hours.

## IS GENDER RELEVANT?

NO

Gender is irrelevant when the communication is not aimed at a specific person, e.g., a job advertisement.

For the plural, use:

**‘they’, ‘the persons’, ‘the individuals’, ‘the people’** (+ ‘who’, not that’)

*Example:* They will be responsible for...  
The individuals who...

**Alternative strategies for both singular and plural:**

You can also **pare sentences** of references to gender and/or change the word order.

*Example:*



Hobbes said **he** would like a tuna sandwich, and he asked that Calvin serve it.

You can also use **the passive voice**

*Example:*



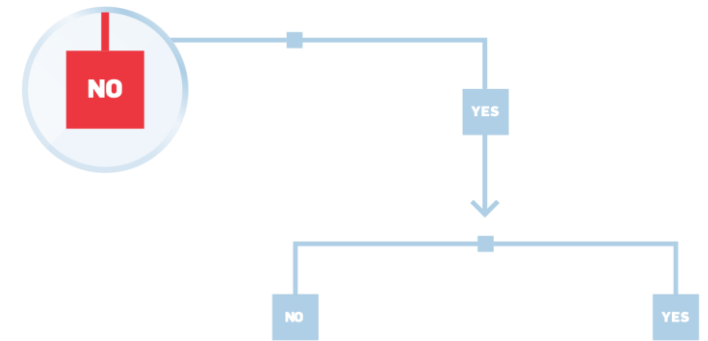
**He** will order the exploding fridges from Acme.



Hobbes would like/requested a tuna sandwich as asked that Calvin **be the one** to serve it/**that it be served** by Calvin.



The exploding fridges **will be ordered** from Acme.



## IS GENDER RELEVANT?

NO

Gender is irrelevant when the communication is not aimed at a specific person.

### Notes:

#### 1. Ensure consistency

Don't alternate between 'he' and 'she', as this causes confusion. When using 'he/she', alternate between putting 'he' and 'she' first.

#### Example:



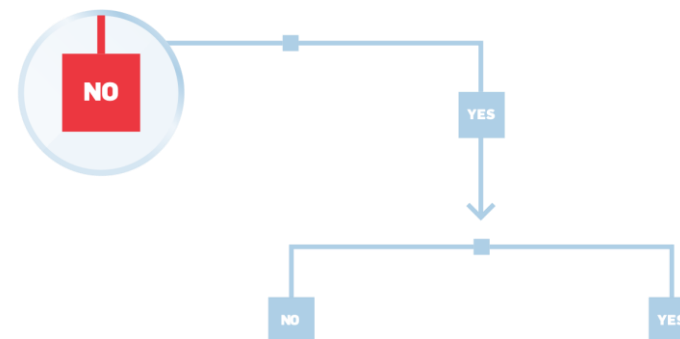
**He** will be given the option to order from Acme, and **she** will have sole discretion in the choice of anvils and exploding fridges.

This sounds like you are referring to two individuals.

Rather say:



**He or she/The person** will be given the option to order from Acme, and **he or she/the person** will have sole discretion in the choice of anvils and explosives.



#### 2. Ensure concord

#### Example:



Elmer Fudd will demonstrate how **they** roast a duck.

Elmer Fudd is a single individual; therefore, referring to Elmer as 'they' is a concord error.

Rather say:



Elmer Fudd will demonstrate how **one** roasts a duck.

## PART 1

# IS GENDER RELEVANT?

YES

Gender is relevant when you are addressing a specific or known individual.

1. **Confirm** the person's preferred title, if possible.

2. Use **'one'** to avoid any reference to gender.

*Example:*



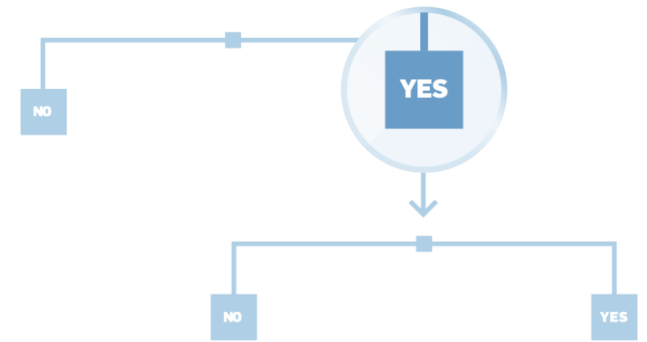
Spongebob Squarepants will explain how **he** aced the Astrophysics exam.



Spongebob Squarepants will explain how **he or she** aced the Astrophysics exam.



Spongebob Squarepants will explain how **one** aces the Astrophysics exam.



## WHEN THE PERSON'S PREFERRED TITLE IS NOT KNOWN:

Use gender-inclusive nouns

Man/Woman	>	Individual/Person
Mankind	>	Humankind
Manpower	>	Workforce
Men and women	>	Everyone/Everybody/The people
Wife/Husband	>	Spouse

*See glossary for more examples.*

Be aware of gender-inclusive honorifics that are increasingly being used

**Mx.**

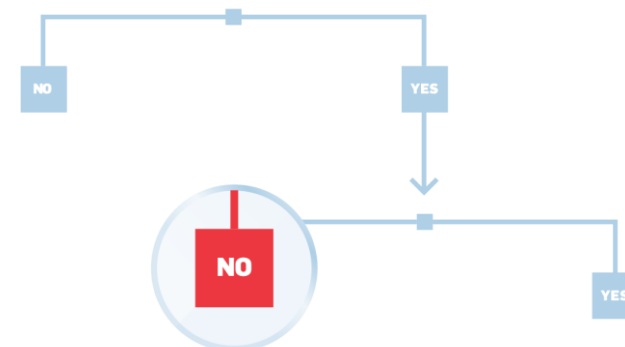
e.g., Mx. Grinch

**Ind.**

(individual),  
e.g., Ind. Popeye

**Mir.**

(blend of the  
honorifics 'madam'  
and 'sir'),  
e.g., Mir. Scooby Doo





### *Notes:*

#### **Ensure conformity in the use of titles and first names.**

##### *Example*



**Mr.** Grinch, **Fred** Flintstone, and **Dr.** Daffy Duck will host an anger management intervention.



**Mr.** Grinch, **Mr.** Flintstone, and **Dr.** Duck will host an anger management intervention.

#### **Remain respectful**

For example



**boys and girls, missy, you guys, dudes and dudettes**



**everybody, they, all staff from Department Knowitall**

# PHRASING

Our choice of words carries a message. If that message excludes a gender or gender identity, it leads to a smaller pool of talent to choose from, and ultimately undermines diversity.

We need to consider the gendered social norms that are associated with certain words and phrases.

## Social norms

Certain characteristics are associated with women, while others are associated with men. Terms and their classification will differ according to cultural norms. Use of these terms ultimately fosters an exclusive organisational culture with little diversity, to the detriment of all, including the organisation as a whole. It is best to avoid these terms when you want to ensure inclusivity in your communications.

Masculine	Feminine
ambitious analytical assertive authoritative confident competent competitive decisive dominant driven forceful headstrong/strong-willed independent lead (verb) ninja outspoken rockstar strong strong leader	caring compassionate gentle sensitive to the needs of others sympathetic understanding warm

## PHRASING

	Gender-inclusive
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>accountable</li><li>determined</li><li>fast-learning/resilient</li><li>good communication skills/communicative</li><li>good leadership skills</li><li>honest</li><li>hard worker</li><li>knowledgeable</li><li>multi-tasker</li><li>organised</li><li>responsible</li><li>self-aware</li><li>self-starter</li></ul>



# PHRASING

Words such as:

***responsible, organise, connect, conscientious, develop, recommend, foster, and analyse***

are not exclusively associated with a gender role, and, used in job advertisements, in concert with the other points mentioned, will greatly increase the chances of diversity in the applicants, thereby substantially increasing the organisation's choice of talent.

## Notes:

Where appropriate, set the tone by assuring the reader that the company is committed to gender inclusivity.

Example:

*Company X does not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity/expression, nationality, age, or marital status, and everyone is encouraged to apply.*

Alternate the use of male and female terms used in pairs, such as 'men and women' and 'girls and boys'. Always using them in the same order implies trivialisation of the one mentioned second.

Limit specifications of key skills and must-haves — only note what is critical to the performance of the job tasks, such as the required education and experience. It is well known that women tend to apply for a job only when they are 100% sure they meet all the requirements.

Being too prescriptive in the advertisement by using words associated with only masculinity or femininity (see pages 10 and 11) may cause a missed opportunity to hire a rare talent.

The use of bullet points is considered a masculine means of communication. Therefore, to ensure that women are not alienated, rather use full sentences that describe the position, the functions or tasks, and the context.

Avoid words that refer to physical strength, such as 'move' unless the job depends on physical strength.

Use exclamation marks sparingly, as this may be associated with aggression.

# GLOSSARY

## Instead of:

## Use:

### General

aunt/uncle  
boy(s)/girls(s)  
boyfriend/girlfriend  
fiancée/fiancé  
grandmother/grandfather  
grandson/granddaughter  
manpower  
mankind  
man/woman  
men and women  
mommy/daddy  
mother/father  
nephew/niece  
guys (when referring to men and women)  
he/she  
husband/wife  
male/female  
man-made (disaster)  
man-made (manufacturing)  
manned

pibling (parent's sibling)  
children  
partner/friend  
betrothed  
grandparent  
grandchild  
workforce  
humankind, human race, human beings, we  
individual/person  
everyone, they, them  
Maddy/marent  
nibling/chibling/sibkid (sibling's kid)  
all  
person/human  
spouse, other half  
person  
human-induced  
synthetic, machine-made  
crewed

### Honorifics and titles

Mrs  
Mr/Mrs/Ms



Ms  
Mx  
Mir.  
Misc.  
Ind. (pronounced 'Individual')



#### Tip:

Avoid using words ending in:  
**-ess, -ette, -trix, -ine, and -er**

#### For example:

-  poetess
-  poet

# GLOSSARY

Instead of:	Use:
Occupations/Positions/Job titles	
air hostess anchorman barman/barmaid businessman/-woman cameraman chairman clergyman comedienne congressman crewman fireman foreman freshman governess handyman heroine landlord/landlady layman/common man mailman manageress midwife patrolman poetess policewoman/policeman salesman schoolboy/schoolgirl spokesman stewardess stuntman/stuntwoman waiter/waitress weatherman/weatherwoman usher/usherette	flight attendant anchor bartender business person camera operator chair/chairperson minister/pastor comedian legislator crew member/crewperson firefighter foreperson/supervisor first-year student governor maintenance person hero owner layperson, average person postal worker manager midwife (Old English for 'with the woman') police officer poet police officer salesperson/representative student/scholar spokesperson flight attendant stuntperson server meteorologist usher

**Tip:**  
 Avoid using word ending  
 in 'man'

# GLOSSARY

## Instead of:

## Use:

### Addressing and commenting:

Ladies and gentleman/You guys  
Dear Sir(s)  
Yes, sir  
handsome

Honoured guests/Everyone/All/Folks (informal)  
To whom it may concern  
Yes, absolutely/Yes, with pleasure  
attractive/good-looking



*Tip:*  
Don't add gender markers to genderless titles such as 'nurse', i.e. don't say 'male nurse'. There is no reason to indicate gender alongside a person's job title.



## A WORD FROM THE PROFESSIONALS



”

OXYGÈNE

Magdalene Kariuki

Head of Public Policy  
and Regulatory Affairs  
Oxygene, Kenya



[Watch the interview](#)



”

sse

Rosie MacRae

Inclusion & Diversity  
Manager  
SSE, Scotland



[Watch the interview](#)







## FOR MORE INSIGHTS, VISIT:

### **Why gender-inclusive language is important**

[What is gendered language, and why should you be aware of it?](#)

[The power of gender-neutral language](#)

[Sexist language](#)

### **Job titles and job descriptions**

[From air hostesses to firemen ... it's time to drop gendered job titles](#)

[Sexist job titles and the influence of language on gender stereotypes](#)

[Eight examples of unconscious bias in job descriptions](#)

[Gender-neutral terms for the workplace & beyond](#)

### **Language**

[United Nations toolbox for using gender-inclusive language in English](#)

[How to use gender inclusive language with actual examples](#)

[Using language effectively](#)

### **Gender identity**

[Fifteen gender identity terms you need to know to build an inclusive workplace](#)

### **Communication**

[Egalitarian communication guide](#)



*Opinions on the social norms attached to terms in language vary, and it is not an exact science. In communication, the priorities are clarity and inclusion, and you have to carefully consider what is appropriate and helpful for your audience and the circumstances.*

*Designed by:*  
**Dr Anita Bosch**

Research Chair – Women at Work  
Professor: Leadership and Organisational Behaviour  
University of Stellenbosch Business School, South Africa  
Email: [anita.bosch@usb.ac.za](mailto:anita.bosch@usb.ac.za)

