



Gender Neutral Writing

It is important to avoid gender-exclusive language in academic writing because it may communicate an unintentional gender bias. However, gender neutrality can be tricky for several reasons, not least of which is the fact that English technically does not have a singular, gender-neutral, third-person pronoun. The following methods of achieving gender neutrality can be very effective.

“Generic” Expressions

Many common phrases in English are in masculine in nature.

Instead of:	Try:
mankind	humanity, people, humankind
chairman	chair, chairperson
businessman	business executive
policeman	police officer
mailman	mail carrier
man-made	synthetic, manufactured
congressman	congressional representative
fireman	firefighter
man	person, human

Pronouns

All-inclusive, third-person pronouns should be utilized whenever possible in academic writing.

Third Person Plural Pronouns (all-inclusive):

they, theirs, their, them

Ex: *Some children like to bring **their** favorite toys with **them** when **they** go on play dates.*

Nevertheless, it is still acceptable to use sexually-limited, third-person pronouns appropriately when referring to specific persons or gendered categories of people.

Third Person Singular Pronouns (limited):

him, his, he, she, her, hers, it, its

Ex: *Some people say that Willy Wonka is creepy, but others think **he** is a wonderful character. A sister is a good thing to have; **she** can offer support when others are distant.*

Alternatives to Using Limited Pronouns

Recast both the noun and the pronoun as plural.

Instead of this: *A student should decide on his schedule before registering.*

Try this: *Students should decide on their schedules before registering.*

Use "his or her" with an indefinite pronoun (like "everybody," "everyone," "anybody," "anyone").

Instead of this: *Everyone should bring his favorite snack to the picnic.*

Try this: *Everyone should bring his or her favorite snack to the picnic.*

Repeat the noun.

Instead of this: *If the doctor does not call back, feel free to call him again.*

Try this: *If the doctor does not call back, feel free to call the doctor again.*

Reword to omit the pronoun.

Instead of this: *If they are not sure what their professor meant, they should ask him to clarify his comments.*

Try this: *They should ask the professor to clarify any comments they did not understand.*

Use "he or she" in place of "he."

Instead of: *When the tennis player finishes the match, he should exit the court.*

Try: *When the tennis player finishes the match, he or she should exit the court.*

Use the same criteria for describing both genders.

Instead of this: *Mr. Smith is a successful lawyer, and his wife is a striking brunette.*

Try this: *Mr. Smith is a successful lawyer, and Mrs. Smith is a talented computer analyst.*

Or this: *Mr. Smith is a good-looking blond, and Mrs. Smith is a striking brunette.*

Avoid using a plural pronoun with a singular subject.

Incorrect: *If a student wants to graduate on time, they should take 15 hours per semester.*

Correct: *If a student wants to graduate on time, he or she should take 15 hours per semester.*

(or)

If students want to graduate on time, they should take 15 hours per semester.