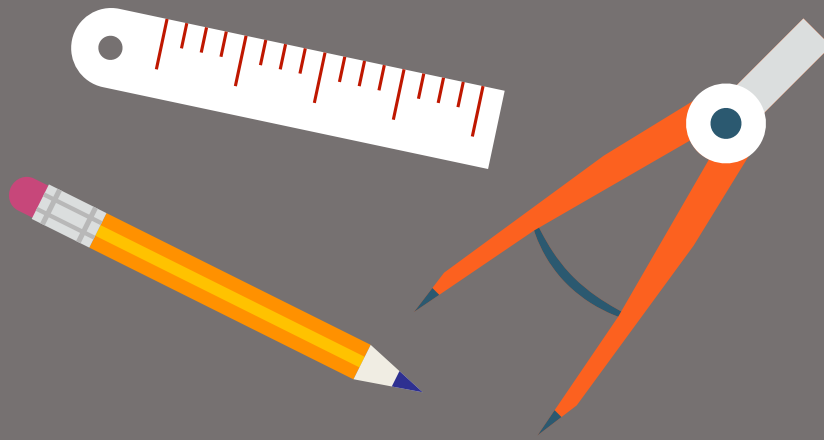


# Eliminating Discriminatory Language in Your Writing



PRACTICAL TOOLS

# Eliminating Discriminatory Language in Your Writing



The language we use in business writing is particularly important because our goal is to inform and not offend readers. It's critical to keep current to avoid unwittingly using discriminatory language. Your goal is to treat readers equally when you write, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion or lifestyle.

## Personal Language

It's considered acceptable today to use he, his, him, himself only when referring specifically to a male person. Using both he and she, she and he, she/he, s/he to refer to either female or male persons can be cumbersome. There are some simple ways to avoid pronoun use if you can avoid it.

The following are acceptable alternatives:

### Rewrite the sentence in the plural.

- Instead of: *The manager will display his agenda on his office whiteboard.*

Write: *Managers will display their agendas on their office whiteboards.*

- Instead of: *Each employee is responsible for material on loan to him.*

Write: *Employees are responsible for material they borrow.*

### Rewrite the sentence in the passive tense.

- Instead of: *He must return it by the due date.*

Write: *It must be returned by the due date.*

Rewrite avoiding his or her after each, someone, anyone, nobody.

- Instead of: *Anyone who wants his work evaluated.*

Write: *Anyone wanting work evaluated.*

## Language for Minority Groups

Terms describing nationality, ethnic or other minority groups are frequently controversial, but some terms are more acceptable than others. Terms acceptable to people involved, however, may vary over time, so it's safe to be sensitive to what the groups described prefer. For example, the term "Aboriginal people" is preferred over "Aborigines."

In general, avoid using irrelevant racial or ethnic descriptions. They're likely unnecessary to whatever you're writing. For example:

- Instead of: A Chinese candidate

Use: a candidate

- Instead of: a Latino manager

Use: a manager

When referring to someone with a disability, the general rule to follow is "people first." For example:

- Instead of: disabled person

Write: person with a disability

- Instead of: helping the blind

Write: helping blind/vision impaired people

- Instead of: a deaf school

Write: school for deaf/hearing impaired people

When referring to facilities and services terms like "disability parking" can be used.

## Discriminatory Words

Here's a list of discriminatory words to avoid—and words to use instead.

Instead of: American Indian

Use: Native American

Instead of: Asian

Use: country of origin

Instead of: birth defect

Use: congenital disability

Instead of: brotherhood

Use: camaraderie

Instead of: chairman

Use: chairperson, chair, leader

Instead of: businessman(woman)

Use: businessperson, executive

Instead of: career woman

Use: manager, supervisor

Instead of: clergyman

Use: member of the clergy/minister

Instead of: Congressman(woman)

Use: member of Congress

Instead of: crippled

Use: disabled

Instead of: forefathers

Use: ancestors, forebears

Instead of: handicapped

Use: disabled

Instead of: housewife

Use: homemaker

Instead of: layman

Use: layperson

Instead of: mailman

Use: mail carrier

Instead of: man-hours

Use: working hours

Instead of: manpower

Use: workforce/personnel/staff

Instead of: man-made

Use: hand-built

Instead of: natural parents

Use: biological parents

Instead of: retarded

Use: mentally challenged

Instead of: salesman(woman)

Use: salesperson, sales associate

Instead of: tradesman

Use: tradesperson