



Inclusive language

Academic writing should avoid making assumptions or value judgments about anyone based on their gender. These can cloud the objectivity of your writing. Many of these assumptions are implicit within language, so it is necessary to avoid terms that:

- emphasise gender inappropriately or irrelevantly
- treat people of any gender unequally
- minimise or trivialise people of any gender

Pronouns

While “he” has been used historically as a generic term, it should be avoided. “He or she” is a better alternative, but it can sound awkward:

If a student finds that he or she has problems with his or her report, he or she should ask his or her lecturer for help before he or she gets thoroughly confused.

A better option is to use the plural pronoun “they”:

If students find that they have problems with their reports, they should ask their lecturers for help before they get thoroughly confused.

If you read in a course handout “every student should attend his classes,” the writer is either assuming that none of the students are women, or that those who are, will not mind being thought of as male. Neither assumption is safe.

When gender is irrelevant

Avoid using words or phrases which indicate gender when gender is irrelevant:

I went to a function for the celebrated lady novelist.

No-one would say “I went to a function for the celebrated man novelist,” so this gender identification arguably implies that the novelist is a dilettante, a woman who writes as a kind of elegant hobby rather than as a serious career. If you need to identify her further, use her name:

I went to a function for the celebrated novelist, Keri Hulme.

Compound words

Be cautious with words and phrases compounded with “man.” Like “he,” “man” used to be used in a generic sense, but there are now more appropriate words to use:

Phrases compounded with man	More inclusive alternative
spaceman	astronaut
mankind	people, humanity
manmade	artificial
salesman	seller, sales representative

The bias may not be intentional, such as using “chairman” instead of “chair,” or “housewife” instead of “homemaker.” However, the emphasis is not to alienate or insult the audience.

Diminutives

Avoid using words which use a diminutive to imply female:

Diminutive	More inclusive alternative
usherette	usher
poetess	poet

(Neither ushers nor poets are inherently male or female.)

Other words

“Woman” and “women” are more commonly used than “lady” and “ladies.” Ensure that paired words are equal. For example, instead of “man and wife” use either “man and woman” or “husband and wife.”

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment’s structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).