

Gender-inclusive language guidance

This guidance provides advice on ensuring our communication - internal and external - uses gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language. This is important for several reasons:

- To avoid bias towards a particular gender
- To ensure our language doesn't exclude members of our workforce, or the communities we serve
- To avoid making assumptions about someone's gender based on appearance, name or other factors

Definitions

Gender identity

A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender expression

Gender expression is how a person publicly expresses or presents their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, makeup, body language and voice. A person's chosen name and pronoun are also common ways of expressing gender. Others perceive a person's gender through these attributes.

Non-binary

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely. People who identify as non-binary may prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns. While there is limited data available about this population, the proportion of UK citizens who ticked neither or both gender boxes was 0.4% in both the 2001 and 2011 Census.

Gender inclusivity

Gender inclusivity in correspondence addresses very current and important issues. The law has given people their rights to identify themselves as a gender other than male or female when applying for a passport. We should endorse and apply this by using gender-neutral drafting when addressing people.

What is gender-neutral drafting?

It is the avoidance of gender-specific pronouns and adjectives such as she/her/hers or he/him/his. Also, avoiding nouns that might appear to assume that a person of a particular gender will do a particular job or perform a particular role, for example 'chairman'.

Writing to, or emailing, people whose gender is unknown to you

When writing to a person whose gender you don't know, it's important not to make assumptions based on their name.

When writing to a specific person use Dear + name (or initials) + last name. For example, Dear Jane Smith. ✓ Not: Dear Ms. Smith. ✗

When writing to an unknown receiver use a generic greeting. For example, Dear Homeowner or resident ✓ Not: Dear Sir or Madam. ✗

The key to writing inclusively is to use gender-neutral terms. Here are a few examples of gender-inclusive nouns:

- Person ✓ not man or woman ✗
- Spouse ✓ not husband or wife ✗
- Property owner ✓ not landlady ✗
- Humanity ✓ not mankind ✗
- Refuse collector ✓ not binman ✗

Using non-gendered greetings

When addressing a group of people face to face, it's important to avoid using gendered language to be inclusive of the whole group.

"Welcome all" ✓ not "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen" ✗

"Hello folks" ✓ not "Hello ladies" ✗

Using gender neutral language

Traditionally, masculine language and terms have been used to refer to people in general. The terms 'he' or 'his' have been used to refer to all individuals regardless of their gender. Sometimes 'he/she' has been used as an alternative, but this is clumsy.

Three ways to avoid this are:

- ✓ **Repeat the noun** - "A person is entitled to a benefit if **the person** earns less than £10,000 per annum"

- ✓ **Use ‘they’ or ‘their’** - “A person is entitled to the benefit if **they** earn less than £10,000 per annum”
- ✓ **Rewrite to avoid the need for a pronoun** – “Everyone who earns less than £10,000 is entitled to the benefit.”

Sharing and checking pronouns

The use of our own pronouns in email signatures lets others know our pronouns and normalises the practice of sharing them.

If you don’t know someone’s pronouns, rather than assuming based on name, looks, dress or voice, ask them how they would like to be addressed and referred to.

We may assume we know someone’s gender based on factors such as body shape, voice, dress and name. It is important, as county council staff, that we avoid such assumptions.

Avoiding gender-based expressions and stereotypes

Avoid gender-based stereotypes such as ‘He drives like a woman’ or ‘We all know that men can’t multi-task’. While these might seem amusing phrases, they can cause offence and subtly perpetuate stereotypes.