**Lesson plan 2 – 2h30m – Gender equality in language**

20

40

20

-Break 10mins-

30

10

30

1. ON BOARD – PICTURE OF PERSON WITH DOG

- Ask students to write down what’s happening in the picture, then read aloud to class (make a note of the gender pronouns used and assumptions made)

- then ask students (individually or in pairs) to write a short story about a person running for political office then read aloud to class (make a note of the gender pronouns used and assumptions made)

2. GUARDIAN ARTICLE – GENDER NEUTRAL PRONOUNS REDUCE BIAS

- Discuss the stereotypes or gender assumptions that each individual/group made. Explain that in a study by researchers, those who used non-male pronouns in the first exercise are more likely to make the politician female or not specify gender in the second.

- <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/aug/05/he-she-or-gender-neutral-pronouns-reduce-biases-study>

-Read together and discuss content and vocabulary

3. WHY GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE MATTERS

- Watch video - Win Chesson: Why Gender-Inclusive Language Matters - YouTube  
 <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=l2YNrEgKHZY>

- Discuss

4. UNBIASED LANGUAGE GUIDE

- Read and discuss guide <http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/unbiased.htm>

- Is this type of guide necessary?

- Complete vocabulary chart in pairs and correct

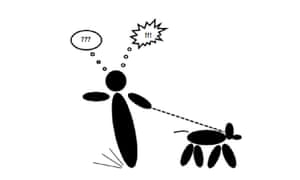
5. GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE QUIZ

- <http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/quizzes/nova/nova6.htm>

- Do quiz together on electronic whiteboard and try to guess correct answers

6. DEBATE

- Some parents nowadays are choosing to bring up their children “gender neutral” (see article below). They don’t identify them as a boy or girl and call them “they”, dress them in clothes for both genders and allow them to play with the toys they choose. To what extent is this necessary? (Team debate with preparation time, or class discussion)

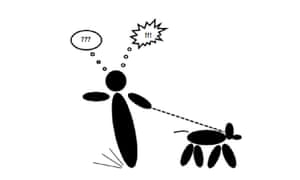


He, she, or ... ? Gender-neutral pronouns reduce biases – study

**Researchers find usage boosts positive feelings towards women and LGBT people**

[**Ian Sample**](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/iansample)*Science editor*

Mon 5 Aug 2019 20.00 BSTLast modified on Mon 5 Aug 2019 21.10 BST

[](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/aug/05/he-she-or-gender-neutral-pronouns-reduce-biases-study#img-1)

More than 100 failures litter the battleground that is the hunt for an English gender-neutral singular pronoun. From thon, ip and hiser to hem, ons and lers, the [discarded terms](https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/25/31097) have piled up since the mid-19th century.

But the quest for the right word is not in vain, a new study suggests. Using a gender-neutral pronoun, it found, reduces mental biases that favour men, and boosts positive feelings towards women and LGBT people.

The finding marks an easy win, the researchers believe, and shows how a minor change in language can help chip away at long-standing gender inequities.

“Let’s assume there are societies that generally agree on being more inclusive of women and LGBT individuals, and there are more than a few,” said Efrén Pérez at the University of California in Los Angeles. “Our findings suggest that the words we choose to use can matter in getting us a little bit closer toward reaching that ideal.”

Pérez and Margit Tavits at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri, explored the impact of gender-neutral pronouns on the views of more than 3,000 Swedes. In 2015, the country adopted the gender-neutral term “hen” to sit alongside the existing terms “hon” and “han”, the English equivalents of “she” and “he”.

Before the study began in earnest, those taking part were handed a cartoon of an androgynous figure walking a dog. They were then randomly split into three groups and asked to write down what was happening in the picture. One group was told to use only neutral pronouns, another only female pronouns, and the third only male pronouns.

The researchers then asked the volunteers to complete a short story about a person, given no name or gender, running for political office. Next they answered questions that examined their views on women and LGBT people.

According to the report in [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](https://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1908156116), those who used gender-neutral pronouns for the cartoon task were more likely to use non-male names in their short story. The gender-neutral pronoun also appeared to improve positive feelings towards LGBT people. The word hen, the researchers believe, helped to combat mental biases that favoured men, and raise awareness of other genders.

Sabine Sczesny, a professor of social psychology at the University of Bern, said the research was further evidence that gender-inclusive language could reduce gender-biases and “contribute to the promotion of gender and LGBT equality and tolerance”.

Laura Russell, director of research, policy and campaigns at Stonewall said: “The language we use is important, especially when it comes to describing or referencing someone’s identity.

“This study adds to the evidence showing that when we use language that actively includes women and LGBT people, it makes a real difference in reducing gender stereotyping. Using gender-neutral language is a positive step towards creating a world where everyone is accepted without exception.”

In English, the word “they” is used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. And while some grammarians claim it is [unacceptable](https://www.theguardian.com/media/mind-your-language/2015/jan/30/is-it-time-we-agreed-on-a-gender-neutral-singular-pronoun), such usage has a long history. As the [Oxford English Dictionary notes](https://public.oed.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/), “they” appears in singular form as far back as 1375 in the medieval romance William and the Werewolf.

“From at least the mid-nineteenth century onwards, new coinages have attempted to provide English with a grammatically uncontroversial gender-neutral singular pronoun and related adjectives,” said Jonathan Dent, senior assistant editor at the OED. “American writers of the 1860s and 1870s gave us (s)he or s/he and ze, while hir, first suggested in the form hier in 1910, was embraced by the Californian Sacramento Bee newspaper, which used it as an alternative to him or her and his or her between 1920 and the late 1940s.

“In recent years, growing recognition of non-binary gender identities has made use of he or she seem increasingly exclusionary in many contexts, and they, ze and zir, and hir have all been used with reference back to a single, named individual, and chosen by some people as their preferred pronouns,” he added.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/aug/05/he-she-or-gender-neutral-pronouns-reduce-biases-study>

**Using Unbiased  
Language**

Final del formulario

**Gender-Specific Pronouns**

|  |
| --- |
| **A student planning to graduate this spring should see his advisor at once.** |
|  |

And we hope that the writer of the sentence above is working at an all-male school; otherwise, grief will follow him or her all his or her days. Our section on [**Pronouns**](http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/pronouns.htm) already has a paragraph on avoiding gender problems with the singular "his," and we refer you to that document. Most gender problems can be avoided without the use of the clunky *he or she/him or her* construction or the more monstrous *he/she* by using the plural: "Students planning to graduate this spring should see their counselor at once." An occasional *he or she* is all right, but after a while it becomes too demanding of the reader's attention, and the device becomes more important than the message. Where a singular pronoun is necessary, use either the masculine or feminine consistently enough to avoid confusion. (You can switch pronouns within an essay, but not within a paragraph.)

**Avoid Sexist Terminology**

Avoid language based on hurtful assumptions about gender:

|  |
| --- |
| **"I need to see a doctor." "She's busy right now." "No, I said a *doctor*."** |

The conversation above probably took place between some chap and the "girl" at the front desk. A responsible, sensitive writer will never make demeaning assumptions about gender role. Whether words such as *chairman* and *congressman* are sexist and hurtful and whether their substitutes *chairperson* and *members of congress* are unnecessary and cumbersome is an argument that some people will still make, but if we can avoid the argument (and the possibility of hurt) with the use of reasonable substitutes, it's well worth it. The following table lists words that many people regard as sexist and some appropriate substitutes for those words:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Avoid** | **Use instead. . .** | | actress |  | | anchorman |  | | all forms of alumnus/a alumni/ae |  | | businessman |  | | chairman |  | | coed |  | | forefathers |  | | foreman |  | | freshman/freshmen |  | | mailman |  | | male nurse |  | | man (meaning any human being) |  | | managers and their wives |  | | mankind |  | | poetess |  | | policeman |  | | salesman |  | | stewardess |  | | waiter/waitress |  | |  |  | | Pearson Education and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) sites offer excellent online guides to help you avoid insensitive language. Click the enter buttons below to find out more. [**Pearson[ENTER](http://wps.pearsoncustom.com/pls_1256647969_pwo/217/55693/14257494.cw/index.html)**](http://wps.pearsoncustom.com/pls_1256647969_pwo/217/55693/14257494.cw/index.html) [**IELTS[ENTER](http://www.aippg.com/ielts/downloads/Avoid%20Language%20Bias.htm)**](http://www.aippg.com/ielts/downloads/Avoid%20Language%20Bias.htm) |

Copy Editor Bill Walsh has this to say about using the word "female":

In most cases, use "woman" as the noun and "female" as the adjective. "Female soldiers," "female priests." Things like "women senators" should be confined to quotes (does anybody say men senators?). "Female" is OK as a noun when talking about animals, when it hasn't been established whether the person in question is a woman or a girl, and when talking about a group that includes both women and girls. If it's ever necessary to use the sexist cliche "women drivers," that would be an exception.

Being careful to avoid sexist language should not lead one into silliness. High schools do not have *women's* basketball programs unless they have *men's* basketball programs, also, which is doubtful (in spite of the bulk and hairiness of that kid playing center). To use *women* and *men* in that context suggests that there is something wrong with being a girl or a boy. On the other hand, why do some universities still have a women's basketball program, but the men's program is simply called *the* basketball program? One last thought: writers should no more apologize for the sexism so liberally sprinkled throughout the history of our literature than they should apologize for the way our predecessors dressed.

In the box below is a perfectly wonderful definition of a college. It was written, probably in the late 1940s, by Howard Lowry, a critic of nineteenth-century literature and a President of the College of Wooster. There are word choices in this definition, however, that might make people cringe today.

|  |
| --- |
| A college is a corner of men's hearts where hope has not died. Here the prison house has not closed; here no battle is yet quite lost. Here, we assert, endow, and defend as final reality the best of our dream as men. Here lies our sense of community.  \_\_ Howard Lowry |

How would we write this piece of text differently today? How about "A college is a corner of our hearts where hope has not died"? and "Here, we assert, endow, and defend as final reality the best of our dreams."? We certainly have not improved upon the sound of Lowry's words, but have we lost anything by these changes? Probably not much, and what we have lost, we've more than gained by decreasing the chances of offending or marginalizing an entire gender from the definition of a college — something that would never have entered Howard Lowry's unbiased mind and generous heart.

**Referring to Groups of People**

Any time a writer wishes to or has to refer to a group of people to the exclusion of others, he or she must be cautious not to use language that is regarded as hurtful by the group being referred to. Nowadays, minority groups and special-interest groups have a great deal to say, and rightfully so, about the language used to refer to them. More than one political career has fallen upon hard times through an insensitive or rude remark. When a presidential candidate a few years ago made a reference to "you people," he surely did so without conscious or wicked intent. Still, the phrase *you people* or *those people* excludes groups without reason for doing so and thus is regarded as hurtful. Staying current with appropriate language is not always easy. In fact, following the history of the ideas and attitudes inherent in words such as *crippled* or *retarded* can be an interesting (if not dizzying) exploration of a nation's social consciousness.

The need to be sensitive, fair, and respectful can lead to all kinds of social and personal discoveries. A blind person will be the first to remind us that he or she is, indeed, a blind person, and the term *visually impaired* is a needless euphemism. On the other hand, we should speak of "blind people," not "the blind." The word *special*, in this regard, has become almost meaningless, and even the term *queer*, which has often been used in a nasty, derogatory way, has writers who claim it as a badge of honor. The power of language to hurt is never more clear than in the realm of racial slurs or epithets. Within an extremely restricted context, the word *nigger* has been claimed as a mark of camaraderie and affection, but only a fool or a boor would use that word outside of that limited social and artistic context and only certain writers and journalists in special circumstances would have the artistic license to use it at all. The Editorials Editor of the *Yale Daily News* contends that "There is, arguably, no other word which elicits the same expressions of disgust, or feelings of shock as universally as that racial epithet." We highly recommend Keith Woods' essay, [**"An Essay on a Wickedly Powerful Word,"**](http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/auxiliary.htm#do) from the online archives of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, on the uses of this particular racial epithet in journalistic situations. Among other things, the essay is instructive in the power of language.

One must be careful, too, in using ethnic and nationalist terms. The word *Asian* is now widely used instead of *Oriental* (except, for some reason, when talking about carpeting) and, in general, it is wise to use a specific geographical term or area when speaking of people's origins. For that reason, the word *Hispanic* seems to have been supplanted by Latino/Latina and that, in turn, by Cuban, Colombian, Puerto Rican, Chicano/Chicana, etc. Most writers nowadays will use *Native American* instead of *Indian* or *Indian-American*, but many Native American writers will use the term *Indian* themselves or insist that writers be more specific (and exact) about tribe and nation grouping (Sioux, Navajo, Paugausset, etc.). In fact, *American Indian* seems to be regaining ascendancy. The discussion about *black* versus *African American* (no longer *Afro-American*) may know no end, especially if Islander blacks are involved. (Note that the terms *black* and *white* are not capitalized.)

And that is precisely the point: *discussion* — it is ongoing and it reflects important changes in our culture. As long as writers try to be sensitive to the feelings of minorities and special-interest groups and as long as writers consciously attempt to avoid divisive language that offends, stereotypes, belittles, or hurtfully excludes people, that is all that anyone can ask.

The *American Heritage Book of English Usage* sums it up this way:

As a general rule, it is good to remember that you should only refer to a person by category when it is relevant or necessary to the discussion at hand. That is, you should ordinarily view people as individuals and not mention their racial, ethnic, or other status, unless it is important to your larger purpose in communicating.

<http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/unbiased.htm>

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Avoid** | **Use instead. . .** | | actress | actor | | anchorman | anchor | | all forms of alumnus/a alumni/ae | alum/grad alums/grads | | businessman | businessperson | | chairman | chairperson, chair | | coed | student | | forefathers | ancestors | | foreman | supervisor | | freshman/freshmen | first-year students, frosh | | mailman | mail carrier | | male nurse | nurse | | man (meaning any human being) | person, people | | managers and their wives | managers and their spouses | | mankind | humanity, people | | poetess | poet | | policeman | police officer | | salesman | sales representative, salesclerk | | stewardess | flight attendant | | waiter/waitress | server | |  |  | | Pearson Education and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) sites offer excellent online guides to help you avoid insensitive language. Click the enter buttons below to find out more. [**Pearson[ENTER](http://wps.pearsoncustom.com/pls_1256647969_pwo/217/55693/14257494.cw/index.html)**](http://wps.pearsoncustom.com/pls_1256647969_pwo/217/55693/14257494.cw/index.html) [**IELTS[ENTER](http://www.aippg.com/ielts/downloads/Avoid%20Language%20Bias.htm)**](http://www.aippg.com/ielts/downloads/Avoid%20Language%20Bias.htm) |

**Beyond Binaries**

It’s not often that an ordinary British couple raising a toddler makes the news. But recently Jake England-Johns and Chanti Humphrey grabbed headlines. “The couple call Anoush ‘they’ instead of ‘he’ or ‘she’, dress the tot in both male and female clothing, and let ‘them’ play with any toys they choose,” says *The Sun*. Why, you ask?

“Eventually Anoush will get told by someone that pink is only for girls and blue is only for boys, and you can’t play with that toy because you are a particular sex,” Chanti explains. So, while their case might seem extreme, Jake and Chanti are two of many young people challenging age-old stereotypes about what it means to be a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’. As Chanti says, “We want to avoid the gender bias that society places on children.” But can they?

**A surprising poll**

A recent U.S. study polled 1,000 young people aged 10 to 19 and found that societal changes over the last decades have shattered *some* gender stereotypes. “Girls have been empowered and believe they can be anything they want to be,” says *The New York Times.* “They are seizing opportunities closed to previous generations - in science, maths, sports and leadership.” Yet the study also found the majority of boys are still constricted by traditional gender norms, and “feel they have to be strong, athletic and stoic.”

(from CURRENT magazine)