



Reducing bias in language: Gender

While you should always be clear about the sex identity of your participants (if you conducted an experiment), so that gender differences are obvious, you should not use gender terms when they aren't necessary. In other words, you should not use "he," "his" or "men" as generic terms applying to both sexes. Replacing "he" with "he or she," "she or he," "he/she," "(s)he," "s/he," or alternating between "he" and "she" are not recommended because they are awkward and can distract the reader from the point you are trying to make. The pronouns "he" or "she" inevitably cause the reader to think of only that gender, which may not be what you intend.

How do you avoid using "he"? There are actually several ways to do this:

1. Rephrase the sentence
2. Use plural nouns or plural pronouns – this way you can use "they" or "their"
3. Replace the pronoun with an article – instead of "his," use "the"
4. Drop the pronoun – many sentences sound fine if you just omit the troublesome "his" from the sentence
5. Replace the pronoun with a noun such as "person," "individual," "child," "researcher," etc.

For more about this, see the APA's discussions of removing bias in language (<http://www.apastyle.org/styletips.html>) and the OWL's handout on non-sexist language use (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_nonsex.html).

The following information must remain intact on every handout printed for distribution.

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