

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

Coláiste na hOllscoile, Corcaigh



NON-SEXIST LANGUAGE

A Guide

**Produced by the
Committee on Equality of Opportunity**

University College Cork has a policy of Equality of Opportunity and is committed to working towards creating a work and study environment which is free of sexism and sexual harassment. The use of non-sexist, gender-neutral language is an essential part of this policy.

Sexism is discrimination on the basis of gender. While it is primarily women who are affected by sexism, it can be used to discriminate against either men or women.

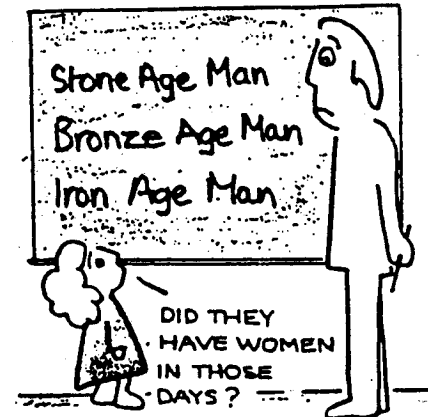
The language we use reflects and reinforces the values of the society in which we live. The English language has developed in a male-dominated, male-centred society. If you examine carefully how we usually express ourselves you will see how male-centred our language is.

Our language

very often

renders

women invisible.



However, language is not static. It is constantly changing to reflect the changing nature of society. As we are moving towards equality in all areas of life, it is important that our language facilitate and reflect this change.

The use of sexist language is very often unconscious and unintentional but nonetheless damaging. This leaflet aims to draw our attention to the sexist nature of our language and to provide suggestions on ways in which we can change it.

Rather than limiting and censoring language, the intention is to expand it so as to include all people on an equal basis.

The conscious choice by all of us, staff and students alike, to use non-sexist, gender-neutral language will greatly assist in the creation of a more open and equitable environment in UCC.

MAN AS FALSE GENERIC

It is often claimed that 'man' is a generic term, i.e. that it refers to all humans, male and female. 'Man' was once used as a true generic. At that time the word for an adult male was 'waepman', while 'wifman' referred to an adult female. Over time 'wifman' developed into 'woman', the term 'waepman' was dropped and 'man' became associated specifically with adult males.

Today 'man' is used sometimes to refer solely to male humans, while at other times it is intended to include all human beings. Which meaning is intended is often unclear. Whatever the intention, the use of 'man' obscures the presence and contribution of women.

When we use 'man' it conjures up images of male persons only, not females or males and females together.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
Man is a species who suckles his young	Humans are a species who suckle their young
The man we want for the job	The person we want for the job
The man on the street	The average person, the ordinary person, people in general
Manning the office	Staffing the office

THE USE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

The 'generic' use of male pronouns, 'he, his, him', is misleading and exclusive. Simply stating that male pronouns should be understood to include females does not suffice. Male pronouns should be used only in relation to males. When referring to humans in general, or to a group which includes both females and males, 'she and he', 'he and she', 'she/he' or 's/he' can be used. Or the following methods can be used to avoid the exclusive use of 'he'.

Change to the plural form

Each student must complete his assessment by Friday

Students must complete their assessments by Friday

The lecturer will display his timetable on his office door

Lecturers will display their timetables on their office doors

Anyone who wants his work evaluated.....

Those who want their work evaluated.....

Change to the passive form

He must return it by the due date

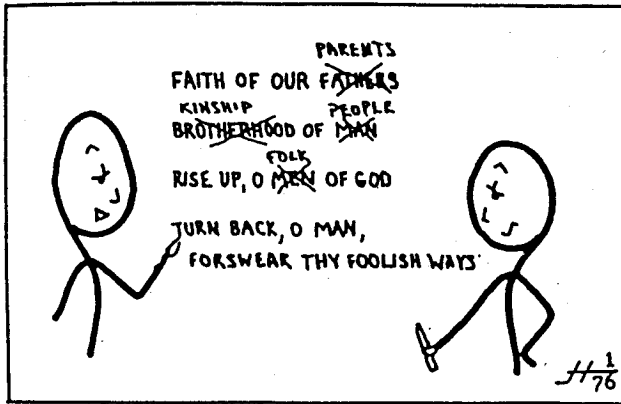
It must be returned by the due date

Use indefinite pronouns and articles, e.g. one, each, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone

A student who wants his essay returned.....

Anyone who wants an essay returned.....

Anyone wanting essays returned.....



SHALL WE LET THEM KEEP THIS ONE ?

SAYINGS AND EXPRESSIONS

Many common expressions and sayings are phrased exclusively in male terms, thus excluding women. Re-phrasing them in gender-neutral terms will help make them more inclusive, without changing the essential wisdom of the saying.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
Everything comes to him who waits	Everything comes to those who wait
To each his own	To each one's own
One man's meat is another man's poison	What is food to one is poison to another
Time waits for no man	Time waits for no one

TERMS OF ADDRESS

The terms Miss and Mrs indicate the sex and marital status of the person while the term Mr indicates the sex only. It is unbalanced and unnecessary to specify the marital status of women but not of men. The parallel term for Mr is Ms.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
Miss, Mrs	Ms

When referring to male humans we usually call them men. However when referring to female humans, the more common forms of address are : girls or ladies. A girl is a young and not yet mature female. A lady is a woman who is perceived to act and behave in a certain socially prescribed way. Referring to adult females as girls implies that we do not see them as mature and responsible human beings; referring to them as ladies implies that we feel that they should act in a manner befitting a lady.

It is more appropriate and respectful to refer to adult females as women.

- Parallel terms of address should be used when referring to males and females, e.g. girls and boys, women and men, ladies and gentlemen.
- It is common for people to refer to women by their first name, while men of similar status are addressed by their proper title. Similar standards should be used.
- In correspondence with persons whose sex is unknown, do not make assumptions about their sex. 'Dear Madam or Sir' or 'Dear Sir or Madam' could be used. Or one could use the Irish term, 'A Chara'.
- When listing names, use alphabetical order, except where some other criterion is necessary. Use similar conventions, regardless of sex or status.

Instead of

Professor J. Collins and
Professor Mary Murphy

Try

Professor John Collins and
Professor Mary Murphy

or

Professor J. Collins and
Professor M. Murphy

Contact Dr. Barry or his
secretary, Jane

Contact Dr. Barry or
Ms. Kelly, Secretary

Dr. O'Neill, Eileen Ryan
and Paddy Walsh

Dr. O'Neill, Ms. Ryan
and Mr. Walsh

On the Fastrack



It has become common for people to address others with whom they are barely acquainted as love, pet or dear. While it is usually intended as a sign of warmth and friendliness, in *some circumstances* it can have quite negative effects.

Men rarely address other men as love, pet or dear, but frequently do so to women. Essentially, they are treating women differently from how they treat men. This could be interpreted as a lack of respect or that the relationship is viewed as potentially sexual. **Whatever the reason, it is inappropriate in work and study relationships.**

When people in positions of authority refer to others as love, pet or dear, it can be felt to be patronising and dismissive. If we are to treat those with whom we study and work with respect and as equals, we should try to avoid the use of overly-familiar terms of address.

JOB TITLES

Sex-labelled job titles reinforce the assumption that the job can be, and is only, done by persons of one sex. This can inhibit members of the other sex from applying for these posts.

Instead of

Try

Maintenance men

Maintenance staff

Cleaning woman / women

Cleaner / cleaning staff

It is unnecessary to specify the gender of a person who works in a job which has traditionally been done mainly by members of the other sex. To do so reinforces the notion that the job is specifically male or female and makes the statement that it is unusual and out of place for that person to be doing that work.

Instead of

Try

Female electrician, woman doctor,
female poet, male nurse

Electrician, doctor,
poet, nurse

The use of female derivatives is also unnecessary, as the sex of the person is usually irrelevant.

Instead of

Try

Poetess, actress, usherette

Poet, actor, usher

Stewardess, Steward,
Air Hostess

Flight attendant

BIASED AND STEREOTYPED ASSUMPTIONS

Try to avoid making stereotyped, biased and often inaccurate assumptions about people.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
Lecturers and their wives are invited to attend	Lecturers and their partners are invited to attend.

In the above example, it is assumed that all lecturers are a) male, b) heterosexual, c) married. The reality may be that the lecturer is female, homosexual, single, cohabiting or living apart from a partner.

PATRONISING AND DEMEANING EXPRESSIONS

Some commonly used expressions have the usually unintentional effect of trivialising and demeaning the contribution of women.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
The girls in the office	The secretaries/ typists/ administrative assistants
Two men and three girls work in that lab	Five people work in that lab
or	Two men and three women work in that lab

SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING

Sex-role stereotyping is assuming that certain traits, ways of behaving, interacting with others, working etc., are 'naturally' associated with each sex. It is seen as inappropriate for one sex to act in a manner associated with the other sex. Our language reflects our notions of appropriate behaviour for each sex. However if we are to represent accurately the reality and diversity of people's lives we need to move away from narrow and limiting behaviour models for people.

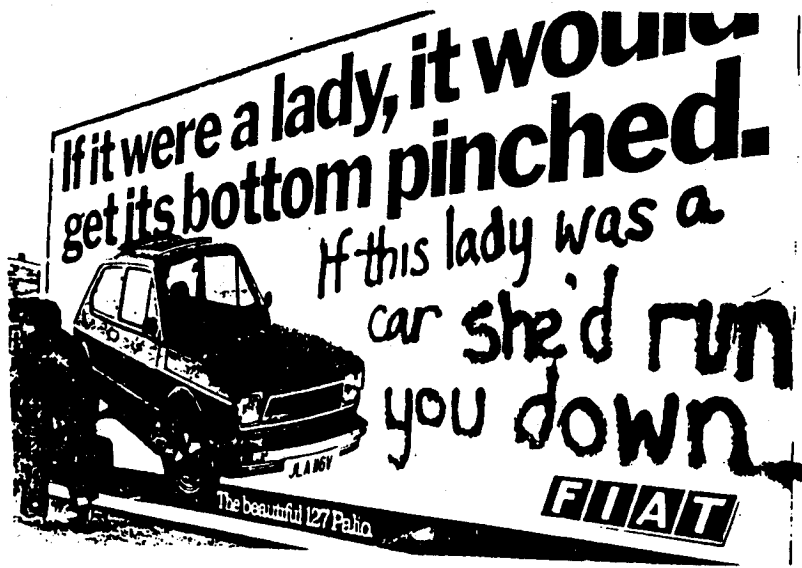
<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
She's a tomboy	She's an adventurous/daring girl
He's a sissy	He's a sensitive/caring boy

Sex-linked adjectives, e.g. feminine, masculine, manly, womanly, arise from stereotyped notions about male traits (e.g. strength, assertion, aggression) and female traits (e.g. passivity, gentleness, concern). They associate with one sex attributes which are shared by all people.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
She's very masculine	She is a strong / independent / assertive woman
What is needed is the feminine touch	What is needed is a caring / considerate attitude

When illustrating a point, posing a problem or writing an exam question, it is important that we do not use exclusively male examples. We should aim to achieve a balance between male and female referents. We also need to avoid representing different groups in stereotyped roles.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Sometimes try</i>
If Tom had 5 apples.....	If Mary had 5 apples.....



Personification of inanimate objects arises from stereotyped notions of male and female characteristics. Objects which are strong or powerful are generally personified as male, while those which are weak, passive or receptive are personified as female. Thus the sun is seen to be male while the moon (which receives light from the sun) is seen to be female.

In common usage vehicles and mechanised objects are often personified and more objects tend to be personified as female than male. Typically objects which are containers, e.g. ships, are personified as female. Since objects do not have gender, it is more appropriate to refer to them as 'it'

Instead of

The ship set forth with her sail billowing in the wind

That car is hard to start but just give her a shove and she's up and running

Try

The ship set forth with its sail billowing in the wind

That car is hard to start but just give it a shove and it's up and running



WORD ORDER

When listing pairs of nouns and pronouns, we usually put the male before the female. This suggests a hierarchy of importance and status. Varying the word order can help to challenge this.

Instead of

Men and Women

Boys and Girls

Husbands and Wives

Fathers and Mothers

Sir or Madam

Try

Women and Men

Girls and Boys

Wives and Husbands

Mothers and Fathers

Madam or Sir

REFERENCE GUIDE

INSTEAD OF.....	YOU COULD USE.....
A male secretary.....	A secretary
A woman professor,doctor.....	A professor,doctor
barman, barmaid.....	bar person, barstaff
business man.....	executive, business executive
chairman.....	chairperson, chair, facilitator, convenor, co-ordinator
clergymen.....	clergy, members of the clergy
craftsman.....	craftsperson, artisan
delivery man.....	deliverer, delivery clerk, courier
draughtsman.....	draughter
fireman.....	fire-fighter
fisherman,fishermen.....	fisher, fishing people
foreman.....	foreperson
founding fathers.....	founders, ancestors
gentleman's agreement.....	unwritten agreement, agreement based on trust
housewife, househusband.....	homemaker
lady.....	woman
laymen.....	lay people, laity
man, to (the office, stand etc.).....	to staff, work, serve at (on) operate,attend,direct
man of letters.....	writer, intellectual, scholar,author
man of science.....	scientist, biologist, chemist etc.
man on the street, ordinary man.....	ordinary person, average person, people in general

man-day.....	work-day
man-hour.....	work-hour
man.....	person
mankind.....	humanity, human beings, humankind, people,human race
manmade.....	synthetic, artificial
manning levels.....	staffing levels
manpower.....	personnel, staff, workforce, available workers,human resources
Miss, Mrs.....	Ms
one-man (operation, show).....	one-person (operation, show)
maintenance man.....	maintenance staff
spokesman.....	spokesperson, representative
stone age man.....	stone age people
the girls in the office.....	the secretaries, office assistants, typists
tradesman.....	tradesperson
workman.....	worker
workmanship.....	quality of work, work skill

WIDER APPLICATION

This leaflet has primarily focused on the question of sexism in our language. However the principles which apply in countering sexism, also apply to countering bias on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, class etc. We need to make a conscious decision to try to eliminate offensive and derogatory language and to make our language inclusive of all people.

EQUALITY COMMITTEE

In June 1989 the Governing Body of University College Cork adopted a statement of policy as follows :

"UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK IS COMMITTED TO EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR MEN AND WOMEN"

The UCC Committee on Equality of Opportunity was established in 1990 to "advise on the formulation, implementation and monitoring of a programme of positive action in pursuit of equality of opportunity within the College, and to make an annual report to the Governing Body."

The members of the 1993\94 Committee on Equality of Opportunity are :

Ms. Siobhan Connolly
Student's Union Right's Officer

Dr. Maeve Conrick
Ombudsman

Mr. Donal Coughlan
Director of Personnel and General Services
Equality Manager

Mr. Michael Dunne
Services Supervisor

Ms. Aveen Henry
Cleaner Production Promotion Unit

Prof. Maire Mulcahy (Chair)
Vice-President

Ms. Pat McNamee
Disabled Student Support Officer

Mr. Pat O Connor
Dental Hospital

Ms. Anne Skally
Exams\Records Officer

Prof. Willie Smyth
Geography Department

Ms. Yvonne Willis
Student's Union Vice-President

Equality Committee Research Officer : Ms. Orla Egan

Administrative Assistant : Ms. Bridie Hartnett

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have referred to various publications in the course of producing this leaflet. The following have been particularly useful :

Miller, Casey and Kate Swift, The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing, The Women's Press, 1981, London.

Guidelines on Gender-Free Language and Language Use for Minority Groups in Equal Opportunities into Practice, Lee Taylor (ed.); CVCP, 1992.

Mills, Sara and Sally Robertson, *Gender-Free Language, Guidelines for the use of students and staff*, University of Strathclyde;

Straton, J., and M. Tonkinson, *Achieving Non-Discriminatory Language, A Guide*, University of Western Australia, 1990.

The cartoons reprinted on pages 1, 5, 6, are from The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing, Casey Miller and Kate Swift (eds.), The Women's Press, 1981.

The cartoon on page 11 is from A Decade of Progress, INTO Handbook on Gender Equality in Primary Education.

This Leaflet is printed on recycled paper.