



## Perceived Study on Avoiding Discriminatory Language in Workplace Communication

### KEYWORDS

1.Discriminatory Language, 2.Business Communication Set up, 3.Variables of Gender, Age, Disability, Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation, 4.Workplace Basics

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**ABSTRACT** *The monograph here elucidates the importance of avoiding discriminatory language in business communication. It is absolutely essential to use the correct word choices when discussing gender, age, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The write up also talks about the avoiding discriminatory language in the workplace that uses prejudicial and derogatory words that will offend others. Discriminatory writing can cause hurt, pain and miscommunication. The three primary areas of concern in writing a business message are discriminatory wording for gender, age and disabilities.*

### Non-Discriminatory Writing

WHO does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, beliefs or religion? It is easy to avoid gross examples of discrimination: expressions that portray one ethnic group as superior or inferior to others,

or gender-specific language that favours males over females. As a writer, you need to be aware of other more subtle ways discriminatory language can interfere with your main message.

<b>Gender</b>	o Using masculine pronouns to generalize for all people. It is preferable to use "human-kind" rather than "mankind," for example. o Using only men as examples
<b>Disability and chronic illness</b>	o Emphasizing the chronic illness or disability rather than the person. Use "wheelchair user," not "wheelchair bound." Use "people with epilepsy" rather than "epileptics."
<b>Age</b>	o Focusing on age when it is not relevant. Use "the project manager," for instance, rather than "the young project manager." If you need to emphasize something related to inexperience, it is preferable to say "the inexperienced project manager." Inexperience and youth are not synonyms, nor are age and wisdom.

You can often revise discriminatory writing quite easily to eliminate the unnecessary noise it causes in communications.

### Non-Discriminatory Writing and Speaking in Business Communication

**Lesikar and Flatley** in their book "*Basic Business Communication*" (10<sup>th</sup> ed, 2005, Tata McGraw-Hill) guide about the adaption and the selection of Words giving the suggestions for **Non-Discriminatory Writing and Speaking** which can be considered seriously for effective business communication.

By discriminatory words we mean words that do not treat all the people equally and with respect. More specifically, they are the words that refer negatively to groups of people. Such as by sex, race, nationality, sexual orientation, age or disability. Such words run contrary to acceptable views of fair play and human decency. They do not promote good business ethics, and thus have no place in business communication. Many discriminatory words are a part of the vocabularies we have acquired from our environments. We often use them innocently, not realizing how they affect others. We can eliminate discriminatory words from our vocabularies by examining them carefully and placing ourselves in the shoes of those to whom they refer. The following review of the major forms of discriminatory words should help us achieve this goal.

**# Use Gender-Neutral words:** All too prevalent in today's business communication are words that discriminate by gender ('sexist' words). Although this form of discrimination can be directed against men, most instances involve discrimination against women because many of our words suggest male superiority. This condition is easily explained. Our language developed in a society in which it was customary for women to do work in the home and for men to be the breadwinners and decision makers. As a result, our language reflects this male dominance. For reasons of fair play and to be in step with today's society in which gender equality is the goal, you would do well to use gender neutral words shown as following.

**# Masculine Pronouns for Both Sexes:** Perhaps the most troublesome sexist words are the masculine pronouns (he, his, him) when they are used to refer to both sexes as in this example:

"The typical State University student eats his lunch at the student centre."

Assuming that the state is coeducational, the use of *his* suggests male supremacy. Historically of course, the word *his* has been classified as generic – that is ,it can refer to both sexes. But many modern-day businesspeople do not agree and are offended by the use of the masculine pronoun in this way. We can avoid the use of masculine pronouns in such cases in three ways. **First**, we can reword

the sentence to eliminate the offending word. The above example could be reworded as follows:

"The typical State University student eats lunch at the student centre."

A **second** way to avoid the sexist use of the masculine pronoun is to make the reference plural. Fortunately, the English language has plural pronouns (*their, they, them*) that refer to both sexes. Making the references plural in the following example, we have this nonsexist revision:

- ~ When an unauthorized employee enters the security area, he is subject to dismissal.
- ~ When unauthorized employees enter the security area, they are subject to dismissal.

A **third** way to avoid sexist use of *he, his* or *him* is to substitute any of a number of neutral expressions. The most common are *he* or *she, he/she, s/he, you, one, and person*. Using neutral expressions in the following problem sentence, we have this revision:

- # When a customer needs service, it is his right to ask for it.
- # When *one* needs service, *one* has the right to ask for it.

You should use such expressions with caution, however. They tend to be somewhat awkward, particularly if they are used often. For this reason, many skilled writers do not use some of them. If you use them, you should pay attention to their effect on the flow of your words. Certainly you should avoid sentences like this one: "To make an employee feel he/she is doing well by complementing her/him insincerely confuses her/him later when he/she sees his/her co-workers promoted ahead of him/her."

**Words Derived from Masculine Words:** As we have noted, our culture was male dominated when our language developed. Because of these, many of our words are masculine even though they do not refer exclusively to man. Take *chairman*, for example. This word can refer to both sexes, yet it does not sound that way. More appropriate and less offensive substitutes are *chair, presiding officer, moderator* and *chairperson*. Similarly, *salesman* suggest a man, many women work in sales. *Salesperson, salesclerk, or sales representative* would be better. Other sexist words and gender-neutral substitutes are as follows:

Sexist	Gender-Neutral
Man-made	Manufactured, of human origin
Manpower	Personnel, workers
Congressman	Representative, member of congress
Businessman	Business executive, businessperson
Mailman	Letter carrier, mail carrier
Policeman	Police officer
Fireman	Fire fighter
Repairman	Repair technician
Camerman	Camera operator

**# Words that Lowers Status by Gender:** Thoughtless writers and speakers use expressions belittling the status of women. To illustrate, male executives sometimes refer to their female secretaries as *my girl*, as in this sentence: "I have my girl to take care of this matter." Of course, *secretary* would be a better choice. Then there are the many female forms for words that refer to work roles. In this group are *lady lawyer, authoress, sculptress and poetess*. Using words such as *male nurse* or *male teacher* can be demeaning as well.

**# Avoid Words That Stereotype by Race or Nationality:** Words that stereotype all members of a group by race, nationality, or sexual orientation are especially unfair and frequently they reinforce stereotypical beliefs about this group. Members of any minority vary in all characteristics. Thus, it is unfair to suggest that Jews are miserly, that Italians are Mafia members, that African-Americans can do only menial jobs and so on. Unfair references to minorities are sometimes subtle and not intended, in this case: "We conducted the first marketing tests in the low-income areas of the city. Using a sample of 200 African-American families, we...." These words unfairly suggest that only African Americans live in low income areas.

Also unfair are words suggesting that a minority member has struggled to achieve something that is taken for granted in the majority group. Usually well intended, words of this kind can carry subtle discriminatory messages. For example, a reference to a "generous Jew" may suggest that he is an exception to the rule that most of the Jews are not generous but here is one who is so.

Eliminating unfair references to minority groups from your communication requires two basic steps. First, you must consciously treat all people equally, without regard to their minority status. You should refer to minority membership only in those rare cases in which it is vital part of the message to be communicated. Second, you must be sensitive to the effects of your words. Specifically, you should ask yourself how those words would affect you if you were a member of the minorities to which they are addressed. You should evaluate your word choices from the viewpoints of others.

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