**Gender Neutral Language**

**Overview:**
When referring to an abstract person or group of people, it is important to use gender neutral language. Use gender neutral terms whenever referring to a group of people that may consist of both males and females. In addition, when you use pronouns to replace abstract nouns, think carefully about your audience and purpose for writing before deciding whether to use a gendered pronoun, to alternate between pronouns, or to revise the sentence to eliminate the need for a gendered pronoun. Thinking critically about what is best for each writing situation will help you choose the appropriate language to ensure that your writing is concise and clearly conveys exactly the meaning you intend.

**Refer to abstract people in gender neutral terms:**
When referring to people or humanity generally, use terms that include both genders.

**Consider the following examples:**
A) For centuries, mankind has preserved culture through storytelling.  
B) For centuries, humans have preserved culture through storytelling.

In example A) mankind is gendered and appears to only include males. In example B), on the other hand, humans is gender neutral and includes both males and females.

**Consider the following terms:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gendered</th>
<th>Gender Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mankind</td>
<td>ankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>womankind</td>
<td>ransition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>eople</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman</td>
<td>unity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Refer to people in professions in gender neutral terms**
When talking about people in professions, use gender neutral job titles.

**Consider the following examples:**
A) Roberta anxiously awaited the arrival of the mailman, who she hoped would be delivering the item she purchased on EBay.  
B) Roberta anxiously awaited the arrival of the postal worker, who she hoped would be delivering the item she purchased on EBay.

In example A) mailman is gendered and appears to only include male employees of the postal service. In example B) postal worker is gender neutral and can include any postal employee.

A) During the short flight from Long Beach to Las Vegas, the stewardesses offered both coffee and orange juice.  
B) During the short flight from Long Beach to Las Vegas, the stewardesses and stewards offered both coffee and orange juice.  
C) During the short flight from Long Beach to Las Vegas, the flight attendants offered both coffee and orange juice.

In example A) stewardesses is gendered and appears to only include females. Example B) includes both genders with stewardesses and stewards, but is unnecessarily wordy and awkward. Example B) uses the gender neutral
term flight attendants, so it is gender neutral and also the most concise term.

**Consider the following job titles:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gendered</th>
<th>Gender Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fireman</td>
<td>firefighter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mailman</td>
<td>postal worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>police man</td>
<td>police officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stewardess/steward</td>
<td>flight attendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waitress/waiter</td>
<td>server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>businessperson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender neutrality with pronoun usage:**

Remember that pronouns are words that replace nouns, and must be consistent in person, number and gender with the nouns they replace. For example, a singular noun can only be replaced by a singular pronoun.

**Consider the following examples:**

A) *Everybody* who likes animals has *her* favorite.
B) *Everybody* who likes animals has *their* favorite.
C) *Everybody* who likes animals has *his* or *her* favorite.

*Everybody* is a singular noun, so it can only be replaced by a singular pronoun. Since the gender of the abstract person is unknown, choosing a gendered pronoun can exclude the other gender. Example A) appears to only include females who like animals. In example B) *their* is gender neutral but it is incorrect because the plural pronoun *their* cannot replace the singular noun *everybody*. Example C) is the best sentence because *his* or *her* is both grammatically correct and gender neutral.

To avoid being exclusive, gendered pronouns referring to abstract people must be chosen carefully. There are several possibilities for ensuring gender neutrality when choosing pronouns:

**Use both a masculine and a feminine pronoun**

Everybody who likes animals has *his* or *her* favorite.

A veterinarian should be careful not to become too attached to *his/her* patients.

**Make the noun plural so that a plural pronoun is correct:**

All people who like animals have *their* favorites.

Veterinarians should be careful not to become too attached to *their* patients.

**Revise the sentence so the pronoun is unnecessary:**

People who like animals usually have a favorite.

Many animal lovers favor one in particular.

Veterinarians should take precautions to avoid attachment to the animals they help. Becoming overly attached to patients is something a veterinarian should avoid.

**Alternate between male and female pronouns throughout your writing:**

Everybody who likes animals has *her* favorite.

A veterinarian should be careful not to become too attached to *his* patients.

**Style Matters:**

Now look at your own writing. Have you used any gendered nouns or pronouns to refer to abstract people? If so, think carefully about whether your word choices accurately convey your intended meaning and are appropriate for your writing task. Remember that if you are referring to a specific person whose gender you know, it is acceptable and correct to refer to that person in masculine or feminine terms. When referring to someone abstractly, however, use one of the above techniques to avoid marking the person by either gender, or alternate between masculine and feminine pronouns. Remember to always be mindful of each particular writing situation and your intended audience when choosing the most appropriate language for each situation.