

Bias-Free Communication

Business communication today must avoid undue emphasis on distinctions among people, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and age. New conventions strive to be bias free, sometimes by avoiding distinctions in these areas. For example, “Dear Sir” assumes a male audience, which may not be accurate. But “Dear Team Leader” makes no assumption about gender. Use the table below as a quick reference for bias-free communication.

For Salutations

Instead of . . .	Say instead. . .
<i>Dear Mr., Mrs., Ms. Brown:</i>	Dear M. Brown:
<i>Dear Pat O’Neal: (gender unknown)</i>	Dear P. O’Neal:
<i>To Whom It May Concern:</i>	Dear Customer: (generic) Dear Team Member: (role) Dear Marketing Manager: (title) Dear RX Drug Store: (company name) Dear Internal Revenue Service: (agency name)

For Other Stereotypes

Instead of . . .	Say instead. . .
<i>salesman</i>	sales representative
<i>man-made</i>	synthetic, manufactured
<i>manpower</i>	workforce, staff, personnel
<i>mans his helicopter mans his post</i>	operates the helicopter staffs the post
<i>his</i>	Avoid the masculine pronoun. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use <i>the</i>, or rewrite material using the plurals, <i>their</i> or <i>you</i>. • Use <i>his</i> or <i>her</i> infrequently and if nothing else works.
<i>the handicapped the blind handicapped customers</i>	Mention the person first and then mention the disability as a modifier after the noun. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customers <i>who use wheelchairs</i> • customers <i>who are blind</i> • customers <i>who have low vision</i> • customers <i>with limited dexterity</i>.
<i>suffers from, stricken with, afflicted by</i>	Avoid using terms with undue emotional connotations that engender discomfort, pity, or guilt.