Avoiding Sexist Writing

Over the past 30 years, our society has grown increasingly aware of the way language shapes attitudes. Because of this, many readers -- both men and women -- are bothered by sexist language.

Fortunately, many easy, elegant nonsexist writing strategies are available to you. It's worth your time to learn these strategies in order to avoid accidentally offending your readers.

1. **Avoid using *he* and *him* as all-purpose pronouns to refer to people in general.** (Of course, if you're writing about a particular male person, use male pronouns.)

   Instead of: Every executive expects *his* bonus

   Try writing

Plural Pronouns:	Executives expect their bonuses.
Second-Person Pronouns:	As an executive, you can expect your bonus.
No Pronouns:	Executives expect regular bonuses.

2. **Avoid using *men* to refer to people in general.** (That is, of course, unless you're writing about men and only men, in which case you'd use the word *men*.)

   Instead of: the man who wants to be an astronaut *or* the men who do their own auto repairs

   Try writing

Indefinite Pronouns:	anyone who wants to be an astronaut
Gender-Neutral Words:	people who do their own auto repairs

3. **Watch out for assumptions that professions or roles are primarily for men or women**. For example, avoid, "any professor will maximize *his* chances of getting tenure if *he*…" or, "a secretary, when *she* first arrives, usually checks *her* mail." Also avoid terms like "woman engineer" or "male nurse."

4. **When possible, find out what name a married woman wants to use, and honor that choice.** Use "Dr." or "Ms." for a title if you're not sure.

5. **Watch for between-the-lines implications that men and women behave in stereotypical ways.** For example, avoid writing that women love to shop or that men care about nothing but sports.

(Information derived from *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers*, 5th edition)