How to use gender-neutral language

Carey policy for assignments

INTRODUCTION

It is expected that all student work submitted for assessment at Carey will pay attention to the need for gender-neutral language, and avoid terms and pronouns that are non-inclusive, unless the context so requires.

PURPOSE

Language constantly changes over time. One of the changes that academic (and also non-academic) English has gone through in recent years is a shift to the use of gender-neutral language. Today, writers make an effort to be gender-neutral, non-sexist, and thereby inclusive in their writing.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

As careful writers, at Carey we avoid language that would universalise one part of humanity to the exclusion of others: for example, avoiding the use of "man" or "men" when we mean "human being(s)," "humankind," or "people." In all such cases, as a matter of courtesy, we will search for alternative words that are inclusive or gender neutral. There are no simple formulae for inclusive language, but a basic criterion suggests that it is wise to avoid distracting our readers with either a gender-specific term that may be offensive or an awkward, inclusive phrase such as "him or her" or "she/he."

We recognize that some Bible translations, such as the NASB and ESV, for example, in an effort to follow more closely the source languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) do not reflect gender-neutral language as we expect it today. Nevertheless, these translations are valuable for close textual study and are acceptable to use and cite in academic writing.

However, when students use their own words explaining the biblical text in academic writing, we expect gender inclusive language to be used when the context implies the inclusion of both men and women. For example, unless directly citing the translation, students are expected to use "humankind" or similar even if the translation specifies "mankind." (This does not mean that we expect changes to be made when a "man" or "woman," "husband" or "wife" is specified in the text.) With reference to God, the language of "Father" and "Son" is acceptable, and so are personal pronouns "he," "him," and "his."

Use of non-inclusive language in any assessment item will be highlighted and taken into account in the allocation of marks for presentation and style. In instances of serious and frequent use of non-inclusive language, the assessment item will be returned to the student for the language to be addressed and then re-submitted for marking.

SOME GENERAL EXAMPLES

The following examples are given for illustration purposes:

1. AVOIDING THE USE OF "HE OR SHE" OR "S/HE"

Use "they" instead of "he" or "she" (if the use of the plural would work in the context):

> "Each student was asked whether s/he would take part in the survey."

This could be rephrased as:

> "Students were asked whether they would take part in the survey."

Change the sentence around to avoid the need to state a gender:

> "Each student should be given an opportunity to decide for him/herself"

This could be rewritten as:

> "Opportunity should be given to each student to make that decision."

Where it becomes complicated or artificial to do this, it is acceptable to alternate the use of genders, for example, throughout a list or chapter by chapter.

2. GENDERED NOUNS

Gender is implicit in many nouns (e.g., "mankind" or "chairman"). There are always alternative words or expressions that can be used. Some simple examples are given below. More extensive lists of suggestions are available.[1]

Examples:

man in the street	people in general, people
manpower	workforce, labour force, employees
cameraman	camera operator
forefathers	ancestors
man-made	artificial, synthetic

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[1] https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language