



Agriculture
Canada


An editorial guide to...

Eliminating Sexual Stereotyping in Communications



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Eliminating Sexual Stereotyping in Communications

Sexual stereotyping is the use of words, actions and graphic material that assign roles or characteristics to people solely on the basis of sex, without regard for their intrinsic potential. These guidelines are meant to create awareness and sensitivity to this problem.

Stereotyping often produces inaccurate images of both sexes, and, as a departmental employee, you must guard against creating such images. Therefore, these guidelines aim primarily at ensuring equality for women and men in departmental communications.

The guidelines are based on the authority of Chapter 484 of the **Administrative Policy Manual** of Treasury Board Canada, September 1982. Examples highlight some common situations but by no

means cover all situations where sexual stereotyping can occur. The guidelines do not apply to material concerned primarily or exclusively with one sex; for example, communications about maternity or paternity benefits.

It is up to **every** employee to ensure that all written and audiovisual material produced at Agriculture Canada is free from sexual stereotyping. No matter what your position, you have the responsibility of checking that all departmental material you approve meets these guidelines.

It is the policy of the Government of Canada to eliminate sexual stereotyping from all government communications. These guidelines support this policy.

Types of Communications

The guidelines cover both internal and external communications: written, visual and oral communications for distribution within Agriculture Canada and its agencies, to other federal departments or agencies, to other levels of government and to the public. Examples follow (but remember that the list is by no means complete).

Internal

PERSONNEL Job descriptions, statements of qualifications, posters, advertisements, audiovisual and film presentations for training, textbooks, information sheets, orientation programs, recruitment and staff development material and manuals.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION Program descriptions, guidelines, criteria, legislation, research and bibliographies.

MINISTERIAL Memoranda to ministers, speaking notes for ministers or anyone representing the government, discussion papers and Cabinet memoranda.

PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON Responses to questions in the House of Commons, speaking notes for the House of Commons and briefing notes.

GENERAL Memoranda, minutes of meetings, forms, reports, directives, correspondence, employee newsletters or publications, administrative manuals, incentive programs and awards, correspondence manuals, guidelines for publishing, human resource plans and agreements and contracts.

External

PUBLIC AFFAIRS Publications, news releases, posters, public presentations, films, slides, photographs, graphics, speeches, advertising, exhibits, newsletters and public relations campaigns.

GENERAL International information, surveys, questionnaires, forms, correspondence and contracts.

Language in General

Sexually neutral terms

Avoid the use of terms that incorporate the word “man” to represent humanity. Although the word “man” has two meanings — “male” (men only) and “humanity” (including men and women) — in practice “man” tends to call up images of males only.

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...*</i> |
|----------------------|--|
| manpower | workers, workforce, employees, labor force |
| chairman | chairperson, chair |
| foreman | supervisor, crew leader |
| man-made | synthetic, manufactured |
| layman | layperson |

*However, when speaking of an actual person, that person may be identified by a title that reflects his or her sex (e.g., Mary Smith is chairwoman and Peter Brown is foreman). When speaking about an occupation or position in the abstract, use terms that do not stereotype (e.g., We are looking for a new chairperson).

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| mankind | people, humanity, human beings |
| man-year | person-year |
| the man in the street | the public, the average person |

Many words that contain “man” do NOT derive from a masculine root, but from the Latin word “manus” (hand). These include “manual, manufacturing and managing”, which should cause no trouble. However, the verb “to man” also comes from the same source. It is as legitimate to say that “staff have manned their posts” as to say “employees have staffed the exhibit”.

It is a good idea to use terms such as “men and women” or “young women and men” periodically throughout a text to emphasize that the message refers to **BOTH** sexes.

Women as participants

Do not portray women as appendages or dependants of men. Recognize them in their own right and for their own achievements.

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|--|--|
| Farmers flocked to the West, taking their wives and children with them. | Farm families flocked to the West. |
| Madame Vanier, wife of the former governor general, was guest speaker at the conference. | Madame Vanier, chancellor of the University of Ottawa and co-founder of the Vanier Institute of the Family, was guest speaker at the conference. |
| Dr. Emerit's secretary. | Jane Doe, secretary to Dr. Emerit. |
| Mrs. William Smith | Jane Smith |

Use parallel language when referring to the sexes. One sex should not automatically be mentioned first.

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|---------------------------|---|
| men and ladies | men and women, women and men |
| man and wife | husband and wife |
| John Jones and Miss Smith | John Jones and Mary Smith, or Mr. Jones and Miss Smith |
| Mr. Jones and Mary | Jones and Smith, John and Mary, or Miss Smith and Mr. Jones |

Many people include incidental information about children in descriptions of women, but not of men. Avoid this. Also, do not describe women by physical attributes when men are being described by mental attributes or professional position.

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|--|--|
| mother of three excels as agrologist | woman from Swift Current excels as agrologist |
| We met with the director, a tireless worker, accompanied by his blond secretary. | We met with the director, a tireless worker, accompanied by his secretary. |

Never use the terms “girls” or “ladies” in a business sense. “Girl” means “a female child” and implies immaturity and dependence, while “lady” refers to a women’s social position or behavior, not her ability or competence. Similarly, avoid the term “boys”.

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|------------------------------|--|
| career girl | executive (or the title of the position) |
| delivery boy | courier |
| the girls in the typing pool | the typists |
| the boys in the furnace room | the maintenance staff |

The pronoun problem

The English language lacks a pronoun that signifies both “he” and “she” and customarily the masculine pronoun has been used to refer to humanity in general. However, there are several ways of avoiding this.

Write in the active voice:

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|--|--|
| Each employee must submit his report by... | Submit your report by... Employees must submit their reports... |

Avoid unnecessary pronouns by altering the structure:

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|---|--|
| The director is responsible for the program. She determines work patterns. She ensures goals are met. | The director is responsible for the program, determining work patterns and ensuring goals are met. |
| The dietitian supervises the diet. He prepares the daily menu. | The dietitian supervises the diet and prepares the daily menu. |

Use the plural whenever possible:

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|--|---|
| Each director should prepare his budget. | Directors should prepare their budgets. |

Use genderless words like “one”, “individual”, or “incumbent”:

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Her responsibilities | The incumbent’s responsibilities |

As a last resort, use both pronouns:

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| His duties | His or her duties |

One or several of the above may be appropriate depending on the text. The important point is to ensure that the text is directed equally to men and women.

Titles, forms of address and personal information

For memoranda, distribution lists or any other internal material, use initials. Within the body of a text, last names alone may be used.

If an addressee is a woman and the writer is uncertain which social title she prefers, it is always acceptable to address her by first and last names, e.g., “Dear Mary Smith.” A professional or academic title takes precedence, e.g., “Dear Dr. Smith.” “Dear” followed by the initials and family name (Dear M.A. Smith) is acceptable for women and men. When both sex and name are unknown, use “Dear Sir or Madam”.

When preparing information or biographies, ask the individuals if they prefer that personal information on marital status, children, etc. be included.

Language and Employment

Men and women at work

Work should never be stereotyped as “woman’s work” or “man’s work”.

Never imply that certain jobs are incompatible with a woman’s femininity or a man’s masculinity. Men as well as women should be described and shown as secretaries, nurses and babysitters. Likewise, portray women as well as men as engineers, plumbers and executives.

Describe homemaking or voluntary work as equal in value to paid employment; implied inferiority often accompanies references to homemaking.

Do not single out women as “workers” in terms such as “working mothers” — would you say “working father”?

Avoid constructions that place women or men in a special class or single out either as the exception rather than the rule.

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|--|-------------------------------|
| She can really handle a tractor for a woman. | She handles the tractor well. |
| He can really cook for a man. | He cooks very well. |

Occupations

Indicate clearly that all occupations are open to men and women. In some cases, it may be appropriate to emphasize the predominance of one sex in an occupation and any changes that are occurring (e.g., “Although most dietitians are women, men are also in the field”).

Cite examples of both men and women in occupations that are traditionally either male or female. In addition, try to use examples of men and women in nontraditional occupations, e.g., women as machinists or men as nurses.

Do not describe occupations in terms that imply that they are open only to one sex, unless speaking of a particular individual who holds that position (see footnote at the beginning of this section).

| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Use...</i> |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| cameraman | camera operator, photographer |
| repairman | service technician |
| cleaning lady | cleaner |
| plowman | field laborer |
| draftsman | drafting technician |
| herdsman | livestock handler, herder |
| saleswoman | sales representative |

Visual and Oral Communications

Visual

The principles expressed in the guidelines for language apply equally to scripts and visual material. A balance need not be struck in every photograph, film segment, etc., but the total presentation should conform to the following guidelines.

- Represent women and men at all professional and non-professional job levels.
- In visual material, try to position women and men in a way that reinforces their equality; for example, do not always seat one sex while making the other stand.
- Show a reasonable number of women and men in nontraditional occupations.
- Show both sexes as active; neither as merely passive or decorative.

- Show women and men of all ages and varied appearances.
- Avoid humor based on sex-linked traits or characteristics.
- Attempt to attribute the whole range of human characteristics equally to women and men and to girls and boys.
- Where possible, include works by and about both sexes in any exhibition, display or visual presentation.

Check photo sequences for:

- numerical balance (if three doctors are shown, for example, at least one should be female);
- job balance (for example, women in blue collar situations as well as in white collar); and
- role balance (for example, women in traditionally male occupations or men as home-makers).

Check visual material for subliminal messages. If, for example, a woman officer is shown surrounded by typing equipment, the viewer receives a mixed message.

Oral

Oral communications should conform to the guidelines for written material. Also, consider the following:

- Women should appear as often as men do, both as interviewers and as the subjects of interviews.
- Female voices should be used as often as male voices in voice-overs for audiovisual materials, regardless of subject matter.
- When women do voice-overs, avoid using background music that is in a lighter vein (different in authority) from that used behind men's voices.
- Avoid using less serious dialogue when referring to women, when women are speaking, or when women are doing voice-overs.

Special Applications

Statistics

Avoid generalizations, particularly when reporting statistical findings. They create the impression that all people within a group possess the characteristics described. For example, "Men outperform women on tests of mechanical ability;" "Females do better than males on tests involving manual dexterity." Try to include reasons for your statement.

Words like "many" or "a high proportion" help avoid categorization of all individuals into a group profile.

Research

Include a breakdown by sex in all gross figures (program participation, client registration, etc.).

Where applicable, direct research equally toward women and men. Even though one sex may represent only a small proportion of the audience being researched, omission of data by sex may obscure important differences; as times change, this will result in the absence of comparable base data from which to work.

Legal documents

The guidelines obviously cannot apply to quotations from legal documents. Further, all communications from Legal Services of Agriculture Canada should be treated as quotations from a legal document.

Some Comments on Tone

Your objective should be to treat women and men equally and to include women in all references to people in general.

Do not make comparisons between the sexes that imply that one is superior or inferior to the other.

Neither men nor women should always be first in order of mention. Instead, alternate the order at times, e.g., "women and men, she or he, his or her."

Do not degrade or belittle women's or men's issues and concerns — they are equally legitimate.

Do not treat family issues (i.e., schooling, children, home) as women's issues.

Beware of condescension; overemphasis of a woman's accomplishments can convey the sense, "not bad for a woman."

When in Doubt

When in doubt about a word, image or sentence construction, consult the departmental editors.

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Guide pour
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communications
les stéréotypes
à l'égard
des sexes

un coup
de pouce



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