

Information sheet on gender-inclusive texts

Making your texts **gender-inclusive** is important to make sure you recognise and acknowledge everyone. Your texts will appeal to everyone and exclude no one. That will make your message more relevant, honest and accessible, and therefore better. There are lots of ways to make texts gender-inclusive:

A fully gender-inclusive text

You can make your text gender-inclusive by not referring to any specific **gender identities**. This can be done by using singular 'they' (1) or plural forms (2), by avoiding the use of pronouns (3), or by addressing the reader directly (4).

Example: *'The student must send **his** assignment to the lecturer by email.'*

1. *'The student must send **their** assignment to the lecturer by email.'*
2. *'**Students** must send **their** assignments to the lecturer by email.'*
3. *'The assignment must **be sent** to the lecturer by email.'*
4. *'**You** must send **your** assignment to the lecturer by email.'*

You can also choose to mention the exact target group and replace gendered terms with gender-neutral ones.

Example: *'It's up to the student to study well. It's **his** responsibility.'*

'It's up to the student to study well. It's every student's own responsibility.'

Example: *'Women need sanitary pads.'*

'People who menstruate need sanitary pads.'

Example: *'Ashley's father and mother'*

'Ashley's parents'

Example: *'You can bring your boyfriend or girlfriend to the reception.'*

'You can bring your partner to the reception.'

In English, we're lucky to have singular 'they' to refer to a person in a gender-neutral way. If for some reason you do need to specify pronouns, be sure to include all gender identities: instead of 'he or she', write 'she, he or they'. This can be useful in languages that lack singular 'they'. In Dutch, the most frequently used set of gender-neutral pronouns, *die/hen/hun*, is slowly gaining acceptance, but there are also people who prefer other variants.

Example: *'Can he or she still apply for special arrangements?'*

'Can she/he/they still apply for special arrangements?'

Example: *'When the student hands in his or her exam, ...'*

'When the student hands in her/his/their exam, ...'

In practice, you'll often use a combination of the above techniques throughout a text. With a little effort and some linguistic finesse, it's not that hard to include people who would otherwise feel left out.

Adding an introductory note or footnote

In English, you can easily refer to everyone with the very common and accepted singular 'they', but unfortunately this is not an option in many other languages. **In Dutch**, for example, singular 'they' does exist (die/hen/hun), but is still very new and mostly used to refer to non-binary persons specifically. So until there is a single set of gender-neutral pronouns to refer to everyone, you may sometimes need to use the less-than-optimal solution of picking one set of pronouns to stick to throughout your text. In that case, you should at least clarify in an introductory note or footnote that you've made this choice for readability reasons, but that the text is intended for everyone regardless of their gender identity. While you can choose which gender to stick to, we recommend not using the dominant masculine forms (he/him/his). Instead, use the feminine (she/her/her) or gender-neutral (they/them/their) forms throughout. It may feel a little strange at first, but that very feeling is a sign of the **unconscious bias** we have in favour of the male form, in Dutch even more so than in English. We can do our part to help break down this bias by not always using the masculine form.

Example of an introductory note or footnote:

For readability reasons, the **feminine** pronouns **she/her** will be used throughout this text. These pronouns should be understood as referring to everyone, as this text in no way seeks to exclude people who do not identify as female.

Example:

'It is up to the manager to provide a safe working environment for her team members. She will receive training for this.'

'It is up to the manager to provide a safe working environment for their team members. They will receive training for this.'