

QUICK REFERENCE SHEET: Inclusive writing guidelines and resources

This quick reference sheet summarizes the main principles of inclusive writing and gives examples of practical techniques you can apply. It also contains a list of resources designed to help you write inclusively. For the full list of articles, visit the page [Inclusive writing – Guidelines and resources](#).

PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE WRITING

Our guidelines for inclusive writing are based on five main principles.



GENDER-INCLUSIVE WRITING TECHNIQUES

Use the techniques outlined below to write gender-inclusively.

Use gender-inclusive nouns

Technique	Examples
Replace gendered occupational titles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An ombuds (not “ombudsman”) must deal objectively with all requests.• Cleaning staff (not “cleaning ladies”) begin work at 6 p.m.• Every server (not “waiter” or “waitress”) must wear a uniform.
Replace expressions containing “man” or “woman”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They fought for the rights of the average person (not “the common man”).
Replace gendered terms denoting relationships (in general contexts or in cases where gender is unknown)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members may bring spouses or partners (not “wives or girlfriends”) to the event.• The child was picked up by a sibling (not “brother” or “sister”).

Replace or omit a gendered pronoun

Technique	Examples
Pluralize the noun	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nurses must carefully record their patients’ symptoms (not “A nurse ... her patients’ symptoms”).
Use the singular “they”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generic singular “they”: If an employee is injured at work, they have a duty to inform their direct supervisor (not “he or she has a duty to inform his or her supervisor”).• Specific singular “they” (used by some persons outside the gender binary): Morgan submitted their report.
Use an article	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each person attending must show a ticket (not “his or her ticket”) upon entry.• A student must complete all the required courses (not “his required courses”) by year end.
Omit the pronoun	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No child may participate without parental permission (not “his or her parents’ permission”).
Repeat the noun	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If a first-time user wants to view content on the site, the user (not “he”) must create an account.
Address the reader directly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You must provide your complete contact information (not “The applicant must provide his or her ...”).
Use the imperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that your leave balances are correct (not “Each employee must ensure that his leave balances ...”).
Use the pronoun “who”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A property owner who disagrees with the assessment can file an appeal (not “If a property owner disagrees, he ...”).



Replace or omit a gendered pronoun (continued)

Technique	Examples
Use the pronoun “one”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerical “one”: A tenant in Vancouver will probably pay higher rents than one in St. John’s (not “than she would in St. John’s”). Impersonal “one”: Under the Canadian Charter, one has the right to act in accordance with one’s conscience (not “a citizen ... his conscience”).
Use the passive voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependent clause: A server has the right to keep any tips (that are received from patrons (not “tips that she receives”). Main clause: When the repair person cannot obtain a discontinued part, a generic part will be substituted if possible (not “he will substitute a generic part”).
Use sentence fragments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The successful administrative assistant will have the following qualities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attention to detail (not “she will be detail-oriented”) - excellent interpersonal skills (not “she will have excellent interpersonal skills”)
Rewrite the sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The motorist should signal before a lane change and then check to ensure the lane is clear (not “and then he should check”). After finding the ideal property, a home buyer should arrange for a home inspection (not “When he finds the ideal property”). Medical help is on site in case a participant suffers an injury (not “injures himself”) during the event.

Make correspondence gender-inclusive

Parts of the letter or email	Examples
Inside address (if receiver’s gender or courtesy title is unknown)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robin Maxwell R. T. Maxwell
Salutation (if receiver’s gender or courtesy title is unknown)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robin Maxwell R. T. Maxwell Dear Robin Maxwell: Dear R. T. Maxwell: Dear Parts Manager: (example of a job title for a receiver whose name is unknown) Dear Homeowner: (example of a gender-inclusive noun for a form letter) Hello, (in an email)

Tailor your message

Context	Examples
Tailoring to recipients who are non-binary	Use the person’s specified courtesy title if you know it; for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dear Mx. Baldwin:


REPRESENTATION OF NON-BINARY GENDER

Members of gender-diverse communities have put forward various techniques for writing English texts that correspond to their realities. Since individual usage varies, it's important to respect each person's wishes with regard to pronouns and courtesy titles.

Writing to or about non-binary individuals

Issue	Recommendations
Pronouns and neopronouns	<p>When writing about a non-binary individual, use the person's specified pronoun:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• singular "they"• a neopronoun (for example, "ze/hir")• "he" or "she"
Gender-inclusive courtesy titles	<p>When writing to or about a non-binary individual,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use the person's specified courtesy title if you know it (for example, "Mx.")• if in doubt, omit the courtesy title, and use the person's first name or initials with the last name:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cameron Clarkson- C. R. Clarkson
Gender-inclusive nouns	<p>When writing about a non-binary person, use terms that are gender-inclusive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "parental leave" (not "maternity leave")• "police officer" (not "policeman" or "policewoman")• "sibling" (not "brother" or "sister")• "spouse" (not "husband" or "wife")

Translating text about non-binary individuals

Issue	Recommendations and examples
Translating the French pronoun "iel"	<p>When translating the pronoun "iel,"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• try to find out what pronoun the person uses in English.• if you can't find out the person's pronoun, use the singular "they" and its forms: <p>French: iel a lancé sa ligne de vêtements en 2000. English: They launched their clothing line in 2000.</p> <p> Note: A person who uses the gender-inclusive pronoun "iel" in French may use any of a variety of pronouns in English, including neopronouns. Thus, it's important not to assume that "iel" is always best translated by the singular "they."</p>
Translating other gender-inclusive text	<p>When translating a text about a non-binary individual whose gender is unclear,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use the singular "they"• use the other gender-inclusive techniques listed above

RESOURCES FOR INCLUSIVE AND RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

The resources below will help you find the right words to write inclusively and respectfully.



An [HTML version of the quick reference sheet](#) is available on the **Language Portal of Canada**.