

Using Gender Neutral Language in Your Classroom

What is gender neutral language?

A way of speaking that minimizes assumptions about gender, sexual orientation or the biological sex of the people being referred to. For example, the pronoun *he* may be replaced with *he/she* when the gender of someone is unknown.

Why use gender neutral language in your classroom?

- Gender neutral language eliminates assumptions about someone's gender identity or sexual orientation based upon their appearance.
- It avoids reinforcing gender binaries and it respects diverse identities.
- The use of gender-specific language tends to be biased towards masculine words, contributing to gender power imbalances.
- The words children hear affect their perceptions of the gender appropriateness of certain careers, interests, and activities.
- For students who identify as trans or intersex, constant reminders about gender binaries can be stressful and reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations.

How can you teach in a gender inclusive manner?

- Never divide the class by gender, or make statements just addressing one gender, such as "The boys in this class..."
- Avoid using words like *chairman*, *fireman*, and *stewardess* when discussing careers or occupations. These are gender-specific; instead use the corresponding gender-neutral terms such as *chairperson* (or *chair*), *firefighter*, and *flight attendant*.
- Instead of using the term *you guys*, use gender-neutral terms like *everyone* or *people* or *Division 12* to refer to all students in your class
- Avoid assigning classroom or school tasks based on historical roles of gender. For example, asking boys only to move chairs or desks.
- Include as many resources as possible within your classroom and curriculum that depict women and men in non-traditional ways.
- Ask students who identify as transgendered or intersexed which gender they would prefer to be identified with and address them as such.