

# RI-MUHC INCLUSIVE WRITING GUIDE

*Developed by Catherine Jalbert, M. A., trad. a., Human Resources Procedures Specialist  
and Diego Herrera, Ph. D., Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist*

Centre universitaire  
de santé McGill  
Institut de recherche



McGill University  
Health Centre  
Research Institute

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## Inclusive Writing at the Research Institute of the MUHC

At the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (RI-MUHC), we understand inclusion as the creation of a sense of belonging, of a culture that fosters equity and celebrates, respects, accepts and values difference. It requires conscious efforts so every member of the organization feels appreciated, respected and able to bring their full potential. We recognize language as a form of representation that allows to create and shape the world we live in. This is why we encourage writing that is aware of the impacts of language and able to create conditions of justice and respect for all subjects represented, without distinction. If our goal is to create a fairer world, we need to start with naming it as such.

A French version of this guide is also available.

### Why is it important?

Inclusive writing is a process that aims to remove all discrimination, stereotype or lack of precision when writing various documents while equally representing all genders and groups. It recognizes differences, names human groups in accordance with their own definitions, questions the traditional way of representing these groups and allows for better understanding of the reality of those that we perceive as different from us.

This guide presents various methods to ensure inclusive writing, such as writing principles and using gender-inclusive nouns. As well, we present tips for inclusive job descriptions. We offer recommendations that you can adapt for your team or research projects. We present advantages and disadvantages for each technique, as we recognize that there is no consensus on one inclusive writing technique.

These recommendations are based on reflections by the Language Portal of Canada as well as other educational institutions both within and outside of Canada. They were analyzed and adapted to the medical research, administrative and communication context within the RI-MUHC. This work was carried over by Catherine Jalbert, Human Resources Procedures Specialist and certified translator (OTTIAQ), and Diego Herrera, Ph. D., Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist at the RI-MUHC. We hope that this evolving guide will contribute to the reflection on inclusive representation and that it will be adapted and updated by different authorities of the Institute and its partners.

## Gender-inclusive Nouns

In order to avoid the use of words ending in "-man" and remove any gendered component, we recommend using a gender-inclusive version to convey your message.

A few examples:

Gendered noun	Gender-inclusive noun
chairman chairwoman	chair chairperson
mankind	humankind humanity civilization
husband or wife sister or brother mother or father	partner, spouse sibling parent
man or woman	person, individual
manpower	human resources

For a complete list of gender-inclusive solutions, we invite you to consult [Inclusionary](#) on the Language Portal of Canada.

## Writing Principles and Recommendations

### Pluralizing the noun

Pluralizing a noun can help avoid using gendered pronouns such as "he" or "she" and replacing it by "they", which is not gendered.

Examples:

Gendered sentence	Inclusive option
The Principal Investigator must complete the Performance Review Form for his employees on a yearly basis.	Principal Investigators must complete the Performance Review Form for their employees on a yearly basis.
The coordinator must promptly advise her supervisor of any issues.	Coordinators must promptly advise their supervisor of any issues.
The new employee must present himself at the security desk to obtain his ID card.	New employees must present themselves at the security desk to obtain their ID card.

**Advantages of using this writing principle:**

- Works well in a formal text where writing in a collective way is prioritized, such as guidelines or procedures. In such cases, the intended meaning is not impacted by the plural form.
- This technique avoids complicating sentence structures.

**Disadvantage of using this writing principle:**

- In some cases, it can shift emphasis away from the individual, and rather focus on the collective. This is the case in contracts or legal documents.

For more information and examples on pluralizing the noun, we invite you to consult [the Pluralize the noun section](#) of the Language Portal of Canada.

### Using the singular "they"

Using "they" as a singular pronoun helps convey respect and mindfulness of all genders.

Examples:

Gendered sentence	Inclusive option
Each research participant should bring his completed form to his appointment.	Each participant should bring their completed form to their appointment.
Every employee should ensure that he or she has read the mandatory policies and documents.	Every employee should ensure that they have read the mandatory policies and documents.
Every member should carry his ID card at all times.	Every member should carry their ID Card at all times.

**Advantage of using this writing principle:**

- It is often considered as the most effective way for making a sentence gender-inclusive.

**Disadvantage of using this writing principle:**

- The use of they can sometimes bring ambiguity to a sentence, especially in cases where there is more than one noun that make it difficult to identify what "they" refers to.

For more information and examples, we invite you to consult [the Use the singular they section](#) of the Language Portal of Canada.

## Using an article

Using articles can help avoid the use of gendered pronouns in a sentence.

Examples:

Gendered sentence	Inclusive option
A request can be refused if the researcher did not duly complete his or her form.	A request can be refused if the researcher did not duly complete the form.
An employee may submit his vacation request by the provided deadline.	An employee may submit a vacation request by the provided deadline.

For more information and examples on this topic, we invite you to consult [the Use an article section](#) of the Language Portal of Canada.

## Using the imperative

Using the imperative is another way to avoid the use of gendered pronouns in a sentence.

Examples:

Gendered sentence	Inclusive option
Each member is requested to have completed his documentation by the 30 <sup>th</sup> of this month.	Please complete all required documentation by the 30 <sup>th</sup> of this month.
Practice is required for the employee to develop her inclusive writing skills.	Practice is required for you to develop your inclusive writing skills.

### Advantage of using this writing principle:

- It is a practical technique in cases where the person writing is giving the reader instructions.

### Disadvantage of using this writing principle:

- It is not as effective when trying to convey requirements to the reader.

For more information and examples on using the imperative, we invite you to consult [the Use the imperative section](#) of the Language Portal of Canada.

For more writing recommendations and techniques on inclusive writing, visit the [Language Portal of Canada](#).

## Tips for Writing an Inclusive Job Description

### Use non-gendered language

Use the writing principles recommended above to avoid using pronouns such as "he" or "she" or using the words "men" or "women", that are associated with gender bias. "You" or "they" could be used as replacement.

### Avoid gender coding

Gender coding is "assigning particular traits or behaviors exclusively or predominantly to males or females" ([American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology](#)). Some of the wording in job descriptions may appeal to one gender more than the other. For a list of feminine-coded words and masculine-coded words as well as a gender decoder tool that you can use to analyze language being used, consult [Gender Decoder](#).

### Write in an accessible manner

Consider using language that is simple and straightforward. Avoid using internal, highly technical jargon specific to a limited environment, or acronyms that only exist internally. If you are hiring for a highly technical position, ensure to spell out acronyms and provide details.

### Limit the content to essential skills and qualifications

Avoid putting emphasis on skills or qualifications that one could learn on the job once they are in the role, or skills or qualifications for which the person hiring is flexible. Women do not tend to apply for positions if they do not meet 100% of the qualifications, whereas men apply when they meet 60% of them (source: [Harvard Business Review](#)). Focusing too heavily on a long list of skills or requirements may alienate top candidates.

### Encourage underrepresented groups to apply

Welcome members of underrepresented groups to apply, and post the position on websites that they use in their job search.

### Do not forget about persons with disabilities

Make sure to clearly explain the accommodation measures that can be put into place for those with disabilities.

## References and Resources

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