

## A Guide to Using Gender Inclusive Language

The Howard University School of Divinity is committed to using inclusive language. Students are required to use inclusive language in all written assignments, and are required to use inclusive language when speaking in class.

Gender inclusive language is any language that seeks to affirm both women and men. The requirement to use gender inclusive language simply means to avoid exclusive or sexist language that subordinates one gender or suggests that one is more suited for or deserving of respect.

Making your speaking and writing gender inclusive involves several areas:

### **1. Avoiding Negative Language**

Avoid using contemptuous or negative language such as “the ‘b’ word,” “babes,” “chicks,” “broads,” and similar terms to refer to women, and avoid using negative euphemisms for men.

### **2. Avoiding Exclusive Stereotypes**

Avoid references that reflect stereotypical thinking about persons such as suggesting that only men are medical doctors, that only women are nurses, or that only men are fully human.

### **3. Avoiding Use of Exclusive Language**

Avoid using masculine pronouns (such as he, him, his) as indefinite references. Avoid using masculine terms (such as man, mankind) to refer to all of humanity.

### **4. Avoiding Use of Male Language for Ungendered Deities.**

There are several ways to ensure that your language is inclusive:

#### **1. Use gender neutral terms.**

Exclusive: Man must reflect in order to understand life.

Inclusive: Persons must reflect in order to understand life.

#### **2. Use plural pronouns which are indefinite.**

Exclusive: A professor must attend his class.

Inclusive: Professors must attend their classes.

#### **3. Use pairs of pronouns that reference both genders.**

Exclusive: A professor must attend his class.

Inclusive: A professor must attend his or her class.

#### **4. Revise your writing to avoid the problem.**

Exclusive: A professor must attend his class.

Inclusive: A professor must attend class.

#### **5. When referring to a deity, repeat the noun, use possessives, or revise your writing.**

Exclusive: The verse suggests that God shows his care for creation through sunshine.

Inclusive: The verse suggests that God shows God's care for creation through sunshine.

Inclusive: The verse suggests that God shows care for creation through sunshine.

Exclusive: The writer says God makes himself known through natural law.

Inclusive: The writer says God makes Godself known through natural law.

Exclusive: God is the Father of all people.

Inclusive: God is the Creator of all people.

Inclusive: God is the Parent of all people.

Be creative in your speaking and writing! There are many other ways to use language inclusively.

