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Making letters and emails gender-inclusive

From: [Translation Bureau](#)

Posted: February 5, 2018

Written by: [Josephine Versace](#), Language Portal of Canada



The Translation Bureau recently published a linguistic recommendation on gender inclusivity in correspondence. In it, we describe some simple techniques you can use to write letters and emails that are inclusive of all gender identities.

Understanding gender identity

According to the Translation Bureau's [Gender and sexual diversity glossary](#), gender identity is “a person's internal and deeply-felt sense of being man or woman, both, or neither.” Someone who doesn't identify with the masculine or feminine gender is referred to as having a non-binary gender identity.

The solution to a current issue

Our recommendation on gender inclusivity in correspondence addresses a very current issue. Let's put things into context. In 2017, the Government of Canada announced that Canadians could now indicate a gender other than male or female when applying for a passport. And some provincial governments have also implemented a gender-neutral choice on identification documents like driver's licences and health cards.

As a result, government departments and other organizations turned to us for advice on the following question: How do you draft correspondence that is inclusive not only of both sexes but also of non-binary gender identities? Our recommendation answers that question.

Gender-inclusive correspondence

Certain parts of a letter have traditionally included an indication of gender. For example, in the inside address, the receiver's name usually begins with a courtesy title (most often, either "Mr." or "Ms.") that reflects the gender of the receiver. And the salutation usually contains the same courtesy title: "Dear Ms. Brown," "Dear Mr. Smith."

Moreover, when we don't know the receiver's name, we have been told in the past to use a salutation like "Dear Sir or Madam" in order to include both sexes. This last solution is part of what we call "non-sexist writing": writing that is inclusive of both men and women.

The problem with these formulas is that a non-binary person may not identify with them. In order to be inclusive of both sexes and all gender identities, a new approach is needed.

Our recommendation

Our recommendation explains what we think is the best approach for gender inclusivity when you are writing a letter or an email to the following audiences:

- individuals whose gender is unknown
- non-binary individuals (that is, individuals who do not identify with either the masculine or the feminine gender)
- a diverse group of people (so that no member of the group feels excluded)

In our recommendation, we show you how to make the receiver's address, the salutation, and the body of your message inclusive. To see what we advise, go to the [Bureau's recommendation on gender-inclusive writing in correspondence](#).

Of course, in cases where you know the receiver identifies with the masculine or feminine gender, you can rely on the standard practices for business writing and use courtesy titles like "Mr." or "Ms." or other indications of gender. But in cases where you don't know, use the principles outlined in our recommendation, to be as inclusive as possible.

We encourage you to read our recommendation. Do you think it will be useful for your organization or business? Do you already use some of these techniques for gender-inclusive writing in your workplace? Tell us what you think in the comments section.

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It is great to see this government catching up to this day and age...

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