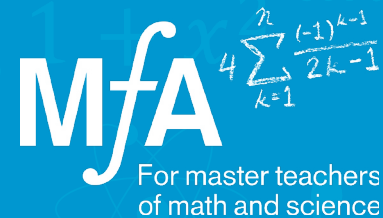


MfA Master Teacher Guide: INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES AT MfA Gender-Inclusive Language



All MfA Master Teachers have a responsibility to use gender-inclusive language as they interact, both formally and informally, with other members of the community. To help all of us at MfA learn about and practice gender-inclusive language, this guide offers insight into best practices for using inclusive language while acknowledging that the below information only scratches the surface. We encourage all MfA Master Teachers to continue their learning around gender-inclusive language as well as the other inclusive language and practices presented in other documents in this series.

While some descriptors or expressions may feel more offensive than others, at their core, they all reflect and perpetuate sexism and ultimately will not help MfA best live by our beliefs.

In this guide, we'll discuss three aspects of gender-inclusive language at MfA:

- ▶ **Embracing "They" as a Singular Pronoun**
- ▶ **Addressing a Group**
- ▶ **Gender-Inclusive Terms and Descriptions**

Embracing “They” as a Singular Pronoun

One way to include all identities in both spoken and written language is to embrace “they” as a singular pronoun. This change in our vernacular has been supported by national organizations such as the Associated Press¹ and the National Council of Teachers of English.²

Current best practice in all academic styles allows for a generic, gender-neutral, third person singular pronoun. By using this in our speech and writing, we can avoid isolating individuals and further show our community our dedication to diversity and inclusion.

Embracing “they” as a singular pronoun is more inclusive, avoids the use of binary statements, and is, for many, initially uncomfortable to use. The table below provides examples of how to use “they” or how to change sentence structure to avoid the use of pronouns altogether.

Gender-Inclusive	Gender-Biased
Someone left their tablet behind.	Someone left his or her tablet behind.
What a student remembers after coming back from break.	What a student remembers after he or she comes back from break.
Alex is a new teacher who is teaching physics this year.	Alex is a new teacher. He is teaching physics this year.
Alex is a new teacher who is teaching physics this year.	Alex is a new teacher. He is teaching physics this year.
Chris should wait until they are notified of their acceptance.	Chris should wait until she is notified of her acceptance.

¹ [Making a case for a singular ‘they’](#)

² [NCTE Statement on Gender and Language](#)

Addressing a Group

When we work towards norms of gender-inclusive language, we can think carefully about how we refer to groups of people. Some have started using binary statements such as “men and women” or “ladies and gentlemen” in an effort to be inclusive. However, this could isolate non-binary and genderqueer individuals in our community. It is important to remember that gender is not binary. Therefore, to help all members of our community feel included and empowered, we can change our language to embody all identities.

Gender-Inclusive	Gender-Biased
“Teachers,” “participants,” “friends,” “folks,” “all,” “everyone,” or “y’all.”	“Guys,” “ladies,” “ladies and gentlemen,” “men and women.”

When gender-biased language occurs in a workshop or in other informal interactions, either by yourself or another member of the community, consider the following suggestions on how to respond clearly and respectfully.

Correcting oneself when you use gender-biased language: You do not have to beat yourself up over your mistake. We all make them.

Correcting another person’s gender-biased language: Be direct and clear without judgment. Then allow the person to apologize and rephrase their statement.

Sample Statements
“OK guys. I’m sorry, I mean, everyone. I’ve been working to break the habit of using the gendered word “guys” when referring to groups of people. So, again...OK, everyone...”
“I noticed you used “guys” to refer to everyone. Can we try using gender-inclusive language in this setting instead? I’ve been using y’all.”

Gender-Inclusive Terms and Descriptions

To help all our teachers and people who interact with MfA feel more included and safe, there are other ways to practice gender-inclusive language. Firstly, we can remove gendered language, such as using “congressman” as the default rather than “legislature” or “representative.” By not using words that end in “-man” as the default for a descriptor, we can move towards normalizing that anyone can perform a job regardless of their gender identity.

Gender-Inclusive	Gender-Biased
Humankind	Mankind
Personnel, Staff	Manpower
Lower classes, 9th graders, 10th graders	Lower classmen
Upper classes, 11th graders, 12th graders	Upperclassmen
Principal	Woman principal
Parent Child Sibling	Mother/father Son/daughter Sister/brother
Partner, significant other, spouse	Girlfriend/boyfriend, wife/husband

Continued Learning

MfA is dedicated to building a professional community where teachers can learn from each other. This community is built on teacher-to-teacher collaboration, which happens when people can connect across differences. One way we can do this so all teachers show up in our spaces fully as who they are is by using gender-inclusive language and respecting people's pronouns. It is also important that teachers hold themselves and their colleagues accountable. For more on how to interrupt biases, please see the [MfA Master Teacher Guide: Interrupting Biases](#).

For more background on gender-inclusive language, we encourage you to continue your personal learning journey. Some resources for this include the following:

- [Gender-Inclusive / Non-Sexist Language Guidelines and Resources](#)
- [Pronouns: A Guide from GLSEN](#)
- [MyPronouns.org Resources on Personal Pronouns](#)

Other organizations you may consider exploring include the following:

- [New York City Oral Trans History Project](#): NYC Oral Trans History Project is a community archive devoted to the collection, preservation, and sharing of trans histories, organized in collaboration with the New York Public Library.
- [The Center](#): The Center in New York City is a community center focused on the needs of the LGBT community, offering services as well as a wealth of resources.
- [The Trevor Project](#): The Trevor Project is a leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13-24.

For suggestions, comments, or questions regarding this guide or any other resources, please contact MfA Director of Strategic Initiatives Eileen Murray at emurray@mathforamerica.org. If you would like to discuss a particular incident that occurred during an MfA event, you can reach out to Eileen or contact MfA Director of Professional Development Leah Hirsch at lhirsch@mathforamerica.org.