Writing for Change

1.24 Creating Gender-free Nouns

Objectives

Examine the use of male-gendered nouns as "generic."

Challenge the notion of the generic male as inclusive.

Generate gender-free, inclusive nouns and pronouns.

Materials needed

Copies of the handout

Time needed

Ten to twenty minutes

Instructor directions

Ask your students to examine phrases that use male nouns as "generic."

Have them create gender-free, inclusive terms, following a particular formula.

Have them discuss how connotations are affected by word structure and by familiarity.

1.24 Creating Gender-free Nouns Handout

Directions

Convert the following compound words with the suffixes "-boy," "-man," or "-men" into gender-free, inclusive terms using the following method:

1. Change the noun root word into an appropriate, related verb OR substitute a non-gender-specific root word from a language other than English.

2. Add the suffix "-er," "-or," or "-ist."

(Note: Because use of the male endings is so pervasive, there may not be "right" or "real" answers for many of the items listed below. You will be inventing some new words.)

Noun + male suffix	Verb + "-er" suffix	Noun + male suffix	Verb + "-er" suffix
Ex: Airmen	Fliers, pilots	Ex: Statesman	Orator, speaker
Sportsman		Craftsman	
Stableboy		Mailman	
Policemen		Layman	
Lineman		Foreman	
Spokesman		Busboy	
Workmen		Salesman	
Repairman		Crewmen	
Lumbermen		Chairman	

Discuss the changes in the connotation (implications or perceptions) caused by changing the word's structure. Answer the following questions:

How does familiarity affect your perception of a word's "rightness"? (Do you think the words "teachman" and "runman" sound "right"?)

Does use of verbs as root words convey more active, vivid meaning than use of nouns as root words? Why or why not?