

NON-DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE POLICY

This policy has been designed by the Boards of the ACT in order that students at all levels, as well as teachers, examiners and supervisors, will avoid discriminating language. By discriminating language we mean speaking or writing in a way that discriminates against, vilifies or denigrates individuals on the basis of their gender, colour, ethnicity, age, disability, race, or religion.

The recommendations below concerning avoidance of male-oriented language in generic contexts (see section 5) are intended for use in language about people only.

Departures from the policy need to be justified by the student, especially if he or she is writing a thesis or a major project.

1. All people are created in the image of God and all are equally found wanting before the justice of God. This revealed truth should motivate us to respect all people since Christ identified with and died for all. Inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ, St Paul sought to establish in the church a new vision of humankind in which the conventional social divisions between male and female, slave and free, and Jew and Greek were broken down and overcome (Gal 3:28). Linguistic discrimination, and its more acute forms of vilification and denigration, culpably undermine and compromise the apostolic vision and should therefore be avoided by those who are committed to caring for all people, including Christians who are committed to showing unconditional love.
2. The issue of linguistic discrimination in our society is a serious one, which we do well to address, and to do all in our power to avoid and eradicate. Australia's commitment to eliminating discrimination can be measured, for example, by the number of federal acts that have been enacted—including the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act 1986*—to make it unlawful to discriminate against others on the basis of race, colour, national or ethnic origin, and gender.
3. Linguistic discrimination, as well as vilification and denigration, may occur by means of the language used to refer to or address others, and may take verbal or written form. Linguistic discrimination against people may occur in various ways, whether by ignoring their presence, excluding them, portraying them in the light of irrelevant characteristics or in an unbalanced way, or using language that is insulting, harassing, or based on a stereotype.
4. The means by which and the contexts in which this avoidance of linguistic discrimination should be achieved will vary according to the context of language and culture in which speaking and writing takes place. In working with already published works, such as the Bible, the issue of being faithful to the original intended meaning of a text will need to be addressed in the context of the need to avoid linguistic discrimination. The balance and tension between these two valid concerns (i.e. faithfulness to original meaning and avoiding linguistic discrimination) will vary between published works.
5. In relation to avoiding gender linguistic discrimination, it is recommended that women be made more visible in language by avoiding an older linguistic usage in which “male-specific” and “male-identified” terms were used in a generic sense. The use of the word “man” should also be avoided in idioms and phrases when the speaker or author clearly

intends to refer to both men and women. The same applies to pronouns such as “he” and “she”, occupational nouns and job titles, and other titles and naming practices. Stereotyped images of women or men should also be avoided. It is recommended that a number of alternatives proposed in the *Australian Government Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (5th edition; 1994) (see pp. 126–35) ought to be adopted as far as possible.

6. Language which is racist should be avoided, and especially with respect to people who are especially vulnerable in the Australian context, such as indigenous peoples.

7. Further, language which vilifies or denigrates certain ethnolinguistic groups on the basis of their language or ethnic background should be avoided as forms of such linguistic discrimination.

8. Linguistic discrimination and denigration should be avoided also in the case of people with disabilities or for people of certain ages.

Mark Harding
Dean
10 August 2004

policies/non-discriminatory policy