## PHILIPPINE COMPETITION COMMISSION

*Ensuring businesses compete and consumers benefit*

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**OFFICE CIRCULAR No.** 2019-06-001

07 June 2019

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| **TO** | : | **ALL OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES** |
| **SUBJECT** | : | **GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF GENDER-FAIR LANGUAGE** |

## I.     Background and rationale

The Philippine Constitution[1] recognizes women's role, as well as guarantee their civil, political, and economic rights. A number of domestic laws provide for the protection of women against discrimination, violence, or abuses in media portrayal, employment, and the family, among others.[2] In compliance with these laws and regulations[3], the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) established its Gender and Development Focal Point System (GFPS).[4] The PCC GFPS spearheads the organization's gender mainstreaming initiatives by developing gender-responsive programs for PCC's stakeholders, in accordance with the Annual General Appropriations Act.[5]

Aiming to develop gender-responsive programs, The PCC, through the GFPS, found that the use of gender-fair language is a starting point since this will serve as an enabling mechanism in gender mainstreaming. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and Civil Service Commission (CSC) promoted the use of gender-fair language to address the issue of the existence of sexist language (e.g., in legislation, government correspondences).[6] Sexist language is "the use of language which devalues members of one sex, almost invariably women, and thus fosters gender inequality. It discriminates against women by rendering them invisible or trivializing them at the same time that it perpetuates notions of so-called male supremacy."[7]

To help address this issue, the PCC, through the Communications and Knowledge Management Office, developed the guidelines on the use of gender-fair language.

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[1] Sec 14, Art. II; Sec. 5(2), Art VI; Sec 11, Art XIII

[2] PCW. (n.d.) Magna Carta of Women: RA 9710 Brochure. Quezon City: Philippine Competition Commission

[3] Pursuant to Section 36(b) of the Magna Carta for Women of 2009 (Republic Act No. 9710) and, Section 37(c) of its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR)

[4] Per the Special Order No. 2017 - 131 dated 26 September 2017

[5] The budget allocation for the Gender and Development (GAD) program is five percent (5%) of the total agency allocation.

[6] Under PCW MC No. 2014-06 and CSC MC No. 12, s. 2005.

[7] Kintana, T (eds). (2014). *Gender-Language: A Primer.* Quezon City: UP Center for Women's Studies.

To help address this issue, the PCC, through the Communications and Knowledge Management Office, developed the guidelines on the use of gender-fair language.

## II. Objectives and scope

The main objective of the gender-fair language guidelines is to eliminate gender-discriminating tenor or sexist language in documents, business communication, and information materials of the PCC, in accordance with the Civil Service Commission Memorandum Circular No. 12, s. 2005.

This document envisions to help the PCC staff in crafting and assessing gender-fair written outputs such as, but not limited to, business correspondences, memoranda, issuances, informational materials, research reports, and knowledge products. This, however, excludes written outputs which require the use of legalese language.

## III. Practical guide to gender-fair language[8]

**Eliminate the use of language that renders women invisible.**
➢ Do not use the generic pronoun "he," "his," or "him" *unless* you are certain that you are referring exclusively to a male person or persons.

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 1**

**Example 1:** A teacher will always be a part of *his* student's life.

    *Use plural nouns.*
    "Teachers will always be a part of their students' lives."

    *Delete "he," "his," and "him" altogether.*
    "A teacher will always be a part of a student's life."

    *Substitute articles ("the," "a," "an") for "his"; and "who" for "he".*
    "A teacher will always be a part of the student's life."

    *Substitute "one," "we," or "you."*
    "As a teacher, you will always be a part of your student's life."

**Example 2:** Each of the reporters finished his work on time.

    *Use passive voice.*
    "The work was finished on time."

    *Substitute nouns for pronouns.*
    "The reporters' work was finished on time."

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[8] Contents and examples were adopted from Media Gender Equality Committee. (2017) *Gender-Fair Media Guidebook (Revised Edition)*. Manila: Media Gender Equality Committee.

➤ Do not use the generic "man".

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 2**

For **"man,"** substitute "person" or "people," "individual(s)," "human(s)," "human being(s)."

For **"mankind,"** substitute "humankind," "humanity" or "the human race."

For **"manhood,"** substitute "adulthood" or "maturity."

Delete unnecessary references to generic "man."

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➤ Use gender-neutral alternatives for words ending in "man" but which refer to functions performed by either sex.

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 3**

Use **"anchor"** or **"anchorperson"** for "anchorman."

Use **"business executive," "manager," "business owner," "entrepreneur"** for "businessman."

Use **"camera operator"** for "cameraman."

Use **"chairperson"** or **"chair"** for "chairman."

Use **"representative," "member of Congress"** or **"legislator"** for "Congressman."

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**Avoid using language that trivializes women or diminishes their stature**

➤ Avoid using feminine suffixes (e.g.,"-ess,""-ette,""-ix,""-enne") that make unnecessary reference to the person's sex. These suffixes suggest that the person referred to is a diminutive or lesser version of the male counterpart.

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 4**

Use terms such as **"actor,"** for "actress"; **"aviator"** for "aviatress"; **"comedian"** for "comedienne"; **"hero"** for "heroine"; and **"usher"** for "usherette" because these terms refer to both men and women.

After all, a person's sex is irrelevant to the functions attached to these positions.

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➢ Avoid using sex-linked modifiers. Inserting a sex-linked modifier before a generic noun is unnecessary and patronizing, and suggests that the position is typically for males.

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 5**

Use the generic **"doctor"** instead of "lady doctor" or "doctora."

Stick to the generic **"lawyer," "secretary"** and **"nurse"** even when referring to a female lawyer, a male secretary or a male nurse, respectively.

Simply say **"hero"** for both males and females instead of making the distinction with "heroic women."

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➢ If the sex of the person is relevant to the usage, use the modifiers "female" or "woman" instead of "lady" or "girl." "Girl" suggests immaturity while "lady" is associated with stereotypical feminine attributes.

**Do not use language that disparages or marginalizes women.**

➢ Avoid using words with negative connotations that tend to belittle or subject a person or class to ridicule. Use neutral words instead.

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 6**

Use **"saleswomen"** instead of "salesgirls" since they are almost invariably adults.

Use **"unmarried woman"** instead of "bachelor girl," "spinster" or "old maid."

Use **"ethnic women"** instead of "minority women." The latter marginalizes them twice over.

Instead of "house husbands" or "housewives," use **"homemakers."**

Use the gender-neutral alternative **"administrative assistant"** in place of "girl Friday."

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**Do not use language that perpetuates unequal gender relations**

➢ Cite names (proper and generic) in parallelism.

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 7**

Use **"husband and wife"** instead of "man and wife." "Man" is a gender-neutral term while "husband" and "wife" are terms that automatically associate the subject with a partner, and all that the relationship entails.

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> Cite the names and titles of male and female subjects similarly.

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 8**

For example, say **"Secretary Diokno and Secretary Briones"** instead of "Secretary Diokno and Madam Briones. Address James Reid and Nadine Lustre as **"James and Nadine"** or **"Reid and Lustre"** instead of "Nadine and Reid."

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> Address people formally in a gender-neutral manner

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**ILLUSTRATION BOX 9**

Use **"Ms."** instead of "Miss" or "Mrs.," even when a woman's marital status is known.

Use a **married woman's first name** instead of her husband's (e.g., "Ms. Annabelle Lee" not "Mrs. Herman Lee").

Use the **corresponding title for females** ("Ms.," "Dr.," "Prof.") whenever a title is appropriate for males.

Use **"Dear Colleague"** or **"Editor"** or **"Professor,"** etc. in letters to unknown persons (instead of "Dear Sir," "Gentlemen").

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IV.    **Self-assessment checklist for gender-fair writing[9]**

The checklist serves as a guide to assess whether or not the language of the written output is gender-fair. This checklist aims to help the PCC staff assess the written output under a gender lens, considering gender-related factors that may have been overlooked in the initial draft. Note, however, that this is not based on a point-system; there is no required number of Yes's or No's in answering the checklist.

A. Content

| Question | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does it emphasize the story, rather than the sex or gender identity of the subject? | | | |
| 2. Does it tackle the underlying gender issues? | | | |
| 3. Does it promote women empowerment? | | | |
| 4. Does it consider or respect women's rights? | | | |

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[9] Content adopted from Media Gender Equality Committee. (2017) *Gender-Fair Media Guidebook (Revised Edition)*. Manila: Media Gender Equality Committee.

B. Portrayal

| Question | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does it portray women and men with dignity, not as sexual objects, or objects of ridicule? | | | |
| 2. Does it have an empowering angle? | | | |
| 3. Does it refrain from promoting pornography, sexual harassment or gender-based violence? | | | |
| 4. Are roles of women and men presented as equally valuable and powerful? | | | |

C. Balance in Representation

| Question | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Are there equal numbers of women and men presented as primary characters? | | | |
| 2. Are there equal numbers of women and men as speaking characters? | | | |
| 3. Are female and male characters treated in a parallel manner? | | | |

D. Stereotyping

| Question | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does the story present an image of women and men as multifaceted individuals instead of stereotypical? | | | |
| 2. Does it avoid associating women and men with certain products or service categories? | | | |
| 3. Does it challenge stereotypical and rigid gender roles of women and men at home and at work? | | | |
| 4. Does it present women as significant contributors across different endeavors? | | | |
| 5. Does it present an inclusive image of the family? | | | |

E. Gender-Fair Language

| Question | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does it avoid using language that renders women invisible (e.g., generic male pronoun, generic "man," terms that end in "man")? | | | |
| 2. Does it avoid using language that trivializes women or diminishes their stature (e.g., feminine suffixes or sex-linked modifiers)? | | | |
| 3. Does it avoid using gendered words with negative connotations? | | | |

| Question | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Does it cite names in parallelism? | | | |
| 5. Does it address people in a gender-neutral manner? | | | |

F. Social Media Etiquette

| Question | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does it avoid providing information that can lead to the subjects' personal social media accounts? | | | |
| 2. Does it avoid promoting stories of abuse? | | | |
| 3. Does it report an incident objectively instead of sensationalizing it? | | | |
| 4. Does it refrain from publishing links to derogatory or discriminatory content? | | | |
| 5. Were permissions asked prior to posting of photos or other material? | | | |

## V. Responsibilities

*All staff members* are enjoined to observe and apply the practical guides in their written outputs, whenever applicable.

*All staff members* are encouraged to use the self-assessment tool in scrutinizing their outputs under a gender lens.
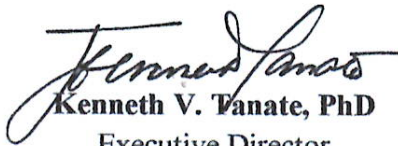
*GAD-TWG*, in one of its events (e.g., gender participatory audit), shall include a session on evaluating select documents.

## VI. Amendment

The *GAD-TWG* reserves the right to revise or amend any provisions of these guidelines, subject to the approval of the authorized signatory.

## VII. Effectivity

This Circular shall take effect immediately and shall remain in force, unless otherwise revoked or amended accordingly.

**Kenneth V. Vanate, PhD**
Executive Director