



EXCELLENCE | EQUITY | DIVERSITY

AVOIDING BIAS IN READING & WRITING EVALUATIONS

evaluations may differ systematically based on gender or race/ethnicity

Descriptive words may be used differently in evaluating members of different social groups:

- **Grindstone adjectives** - (*hardworking, conscientious, dependable, meticulous, thorough, diligent, dedicated, careful*) – are sometimes used more for women, implying that women succeed more through effort than ability.
- **Ability traits** – *talented, smart, able, capable, brilliant*
- **Standout adjectives** – *best, superior, excellent*

Descriptive phrases can unintentionally influence a reader.

1. **Using first names for women** or minority faculty and titles for men (*Joan* was an asset to our department.” –vs.- “*Dr. Smith* was an asset to our department.”)
2. **Gendered adjectives** (“*Dr. Sarah Gray* is a *caring, compassionate* physician” –vs. – *Dr. Joel Gray* has been very *successful with his patients*”)
3. **Doubt raisers** or negative language (“although her publications are not numerous” or “while not the best student I have had, s/he”)
4. **Potentially negative language** (“S/he requires only minimal supervision” or “S/he is totally intolerant of shoddy research”)
5. **Faint praise** (“S/he worked hard on projects that s/he was assigned” or “S/he has never had temper tantrums”)
6. **Hedges** (“S/he responds well to feedback”)
7. **Irrelevancy** (“S/he is an avid skier and stamp collector”)
8. **Unnecessarily invoking a stereotype** (“She is not overly emotional”; “He is very confident yet not arrogant”; or “S/he is extremely productive, especially as someone who attended inner city schools and a large state university”)

Based on: Trix, F. & Psenka, C. (2003). Exploring the color of glass: Letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty. *Discourse & Society* 14: 191-220; Wysocki, V. & Schmader, T. (2005). Recommendation letters of faculty candidates for positions in Chemistry and Biochemistry at UA; and Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Initiative (WISELI), University of Wisconsin, Madison, Handout on Reviewing applicants: Research on Bias and Assumptions.