

ADVANCE

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 & Psenka , 2003; Schmader, Whitehead, & Wysocki, 2007; and Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Initiative (WISELI), University of Wisconsin, Madison, Handout on Reviewing applicants: Research on Bias and Assumptions.