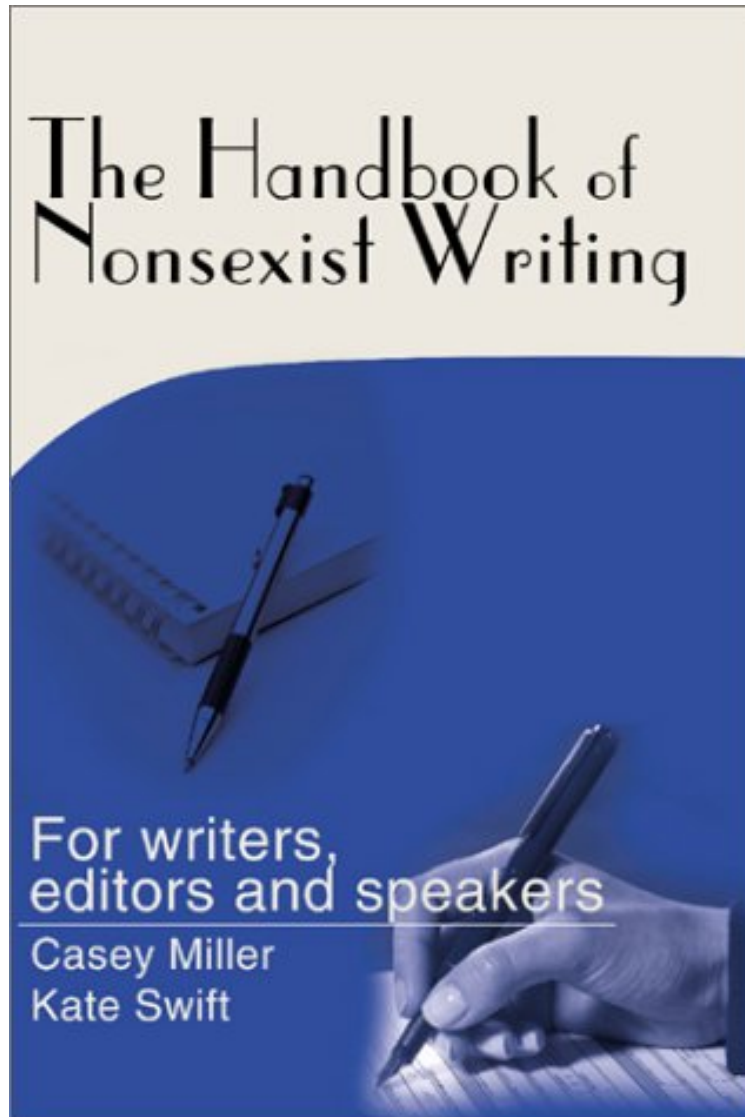


The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing: For writers, editors and speakers

Kate Swift

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Kate Swift : The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing: For writers, editors and speakers before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing: For writers, editors and speakers:

21 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Well-written and very helpfulBy Rabbi Yonassan GershomThe Anglo-Saxon Chronicle described Ercongota, daughter of a seventh-century English king, as "a wonderful man." No,

she didn't have a sex change. In her day, "man" was a true generic term meaning "person" or "human being." Many older English writings do indeed use "man" in this sense. But, as this book explains, our language has changed, and this generic usage is no longer appropriate. Problem is, many writers who grew up on the classics have internalized the outdated language of our literary ancestors. One of the reasons I bought this book was to learn how to update my writing style. The first chapter, "Man as a False Generic," traces the history of gender usages in the English language. This chapter did a great deal to help me personally overcome my initial negative reactions to "feminist" language by explaining how English has grown and evolved over the centuries. For example, "you" was once a plural only (the singular being "thou"), and the use of "they" was once a legitimate generic singular pronoun. Such classical writers as William Thackeray, George Eliot, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and even William Shakespeare used it regularly. Only later, in the 18th century, did it go out of fashion. Now it's back in style again, as a gender-free alternative to "he."

(Example: "Each person can decide what they want.") What I like best about the Handbook is the way it uses actual examples (both good and bad) from published works to illustrate its points. Especially interesting were the references from old grammar books, some of which were so absurdly outdated that I literally laughed out loud. The authors then show how the various examples can be re-written with gender-free language without loss of clarity or style. To me as a writer, this down-to-earth approach was more convincing than the angry diatribes about "Patriarchy" which had previously turned me off to the whole gender issue. If there's a problem with my writing, don't call me names, just show me how to fix it! This book does that very well, explaining clearly and with good humor. I also appreciate the thesaurus in the back of the book, which serves as a quick reference for the most common gender-problem words. The one weakness of this book is that it skimps on religious language issues, which get only half a page. The authors do correctly point out that the original text of the Bible uses feminine pronouns and imagery that got lost in translation, but there are no specific examples cited. Nor does the Handbook give any of the genderless alternatives to "The Lord" (such as Ruler, Sovereign, Creator, Holy One, Blessed One, Heavenly Parent, etc.) now in use among Jews, Christians, and others. Instead, the authors simply refer the reader to a bibliography in the back of the book. But unless you happen to be a theologian, you are not likely to have those references handy when you need a quick synonym for "The Lord." Nor is "The Lord" included in the list of problem words in the Handbook's thesaurus, although "Goddess" does rate an entry as a no-no (as are all "-ess" words, according to this book). It would have been more helpful to give a few examples from those bibliography resources.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Great women, vital cultural contribution! Bring it back! By gayle brooks I am fortunate enough to have known both Kate and Casey. Having written this book, they made great use of what they knew and taught us. My favorite story is about convincing a Connecticut congressional representative, Nancy Johnson that she was not a Congress Man, but it took several attempts. Finally, another Republican woman Rep. switched, and so did Congresswoman Johnson. It was a process that would play out many thousands of times with as many women and more. We are all grateful to them for giving us the language and courage to make what we say more accurately describe our experience. I worked with adolescent girls for years. Given some cultural influences on them, their struggle is not between using 'man' or 'woman,' but in not seeing one thing wrong with referring to each another as 'bitches' and 'hos'. It happens across all cultural and economic strata. For them the book is even more relevant now than then, as it is for the women in their lives who serve as role models, teachers, and family. Gayle Brooks 11 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Mostly good. Certainly worth reading. By Mike Baum My views on the English language are somewhat conservative, so I approached this book with suspicion and an intent simply to broaden my horizons. To my relief, even though I do not agree with all its conclusions, I've found the book definitely worthwhile. It is short but well-written and thorough, tackling major issues in nonsexist writing with humor and clarity. Its detailed, structured table of contents is especially helpful as it enables the reader to get quickly to a desired topic, whether it be the use of "man" as a suffix, "they" as a singular, gratuitous modifiers, assigning gender to gender-neutral terms, or whatnot. Its examples of (allegedly) sexist and nonsexist writing are useful, and frequently are pulled from actual published works. Shakespeare, for example, is quoted as having written "God send everyone their heart's desire," which is used as evidence that "their" as a singular pronoun has not always been taboo in English; it is only since the eighteenth or nineteenth century, the authors argue, that grammarians began eschewing "their" in favor of "his." Helpful reference notes to books and scholarly articles are included for readers who want to check up on such claims. (This I certainly intend to do in a few cases, in particular with regard to the authors' interesting assertion that Thomas Jefferson meant only males when he wrote in his Declaration that "all men are created equal.") I must mention that the authors occasionally lapse into what I can only term idiocy. For example, they apparently believe that the use of "man" as a verb (e.g., "The emergency room must be manned at all times") is sexist, despite the fact that, whatever its origin (which is irrelevant to its present-day meaning), the word has no sexist connotations for us today. Indeed, based on the authors' treatment of the verb "to man," I see no reason not to throw out all words with "man" in them (such as by changing "woman" to "womyn")--but the authors elsewhere reject such an approach, and rightfully so. So why this concern for a word's etymology if it has no practical effect in the present? The authors also seem to realize that a single word, such as "man," can refer validly to two distinct concepts, such as generic or gender-specific "man," which is good. But at times they inexplicably assert ambiguity when none is, in fact, present. I grant that in some cases such ambiguity is extremely hard, if not

impossible, to avoid, and I am grateful for having been made aware of such instances; but the authors' occasional misidentifications do not give me confidence in their being free from bias themselves. This book's shortcomings notwithstanding, however, I must give it my recommendation. It contains many examples of sexist pitfalls in writing that I have not until now been aware of. I know I will use this book in the future when I have need of extra care to avoid offending an audience's sensibilities.

Man, he brotherhood, founding fathers. It is argued that such words are and always have been used by educated people to encompass all humanitymen and women. Psychological and historical research in the past few years has produced evidence to the contrary: for most people false generics seldom if ever convey a female image, nor are they ancient unchangeable rules of the English grammar that have always been used by the educated. Using hundreds of examples, mostly from published sources, the authors illustrate what certain words are saying to us on a subliminal level. Solutions are supplied that range from word substitutions to suggestions for rewriting. Without a trace of self-conscious righteousness, and with refreshing humor, Miller and Swift provide surprising insights into the English language and the ways in which people use it and are used by it. They demonstrate that to be in command of the language, we must find clear, convincing, and graceful ways to convey our ideas accurately. We must recognize and replace exclusive, distorting, ambiguous, and injurious words.

About the Author Casey Miller and Kate Swift worked together as coauthors and freelance editors for nearly thirty years until Miller's death in 1997. Miller, an Ohio native and graduate of Smith College. Was formerly an editor with the Seabury Press and other publishers, including Colonial Williamsburg, Inc. She served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Swift, a New Yorker, had been a science writer with the American Museum of Natural History and later the Yale School of Medicine, A graduate of the University of North Carolina, she served in the U.S. Army in World War II.