Gender stereotypes are harmful. This isn’t a trivial issue about who wears pink or blue – the evidence emerging from Fawcett’s Commission on Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood, in which Pearson have played an active role, is clear that the messages our children hear early on influence the outcomes that matter in their lives. From the amount of time men spend parenting, to the career choices women make, we all pay a price when we impose limits on our children.

But the evidence is also clear that the wiring in our brains is soft not hard, and that every child is an individual. We can challenge attitudes and change lives.

We are really encouraged that staff at Pearson, from the boardroom to content creators, have recognised this and want to play their part in making a change. They developed these guidelines through a process of discussion and reflection, and we are delighted to have contributed supportive challenge and review, and to train editorial and content staff in how to spread their use throughout the organisation.

It is now up to Pearson to ensure that the ideas and lessons we have shared will result in output that actively challenges limiting stereotypes, and based on the enthusiasm and commitment we have seen so far, we are hopeful. Pearson, as the largest learning company in the country, have the ear of our educators and our children. The messages they send about what it means to be a woman or a man matter, and we are glad that they are rising to meet the challenge of that responsibility.

Foreword from Sam Smethers, Fawcett Society Chief Executive
Pearson Gender Equality Guidelines

Produced by the WILL UK Commercial Products & Services Committee

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Introduction

Pearson, through its products and services, helps to form the knowledge base for the next generation. The word choices, charts, graphs, illustrations and photos used in our materials all have the power to shape thinking and reinforce beliefs about gender roles. Text and visual representations may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and send messages to our learners about gender appropriateness and conceptions of ability for all genders. This matters because stereotypes limit children by presenting them with a specific set of acceptable behaviours.

The evidence of how gender stereotyping (the practice of ascribing to an individual specific attributes, characteristics, or roles solely because of their gender) impacts children and young people is unequivocal in showing how experiences of early gender bias can have long-term negative effects. This is seen both in relation to achievement and progression by restricting their career aspirations; influencing school subject choice (which subsequently impacts on career pathways); or contributing to disparities in educational achievement, and also in relation to wellbeing in terms of self-esteem, particularly for those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Polling by The Fawcett Society supports this evidence, with 51% of respondents noting that gender stereotyping constrained their career choices; 45% saying that when they felt expected to behave in a certain (gendered) way as children; and 44% saying it harmed their personal relationships.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that gender is a complex concept and that there is diversity in the gender identities and expressions that people identify with. Pearson recognises the significance of language, which in relation to gender and identity is nuanced, contextual and complex. This guidance and its accompanying checklist have been designed to be respectful of all genders: female, male and non-binary. We aim for a balanced reflection of gender identities, in proportion to their visibility in the societies in which we operate.

One way to bring about positive change is to design products and services that reflect the world our learners live in, and to support a culture of inclusivity. Aside from enhancing awareness and empowering learners to be aware that many more things are possible for them, it is a recognised fact that improving diversity benefits everyone. Designing for inclusivity means better products for a greater number of people, and thus a larger addressable market is a good investment.
The Pearson Global Editorial Policy remains in place as the overarching protocol. The Policy was created and launched in 2017 to ensure all Pearson products and services are free from discrimination and bias, avoid content that is not aligned to Pearson’s values and prevent unintentional errors or inappropriate content being published. The guidance outlined here intends to take this a step further in the specific area of gender equality and the challenging of gender stereotypes across all content (text, illustrations, photos, media) and services. The guidance intends to help Pearson take a positive and progressive approach to this issue, and should not be seen as a burden. Rather, the hope is that it will be a helpful tool for ongoing change for good, and that having supportive and properly implemented guidance will help to foster more diverse and inclusive Pearson products and services.

The identification, awareness of and removal of unconscious bias and gender stereotyping must begin at the concept stage for all of our products and services. The process should start with the inclusion of a balanced mix of genders in project teams: authors, reviewers, academics and examiners, voice-over artists, development and copy editors, designers and permissions analysts, and be carried through the end-to-end process with effective briefing on gender equality to all team members at every stage.

We recognise that guidance alone is not sufficient to drive positive change to products and services and identify and eradicate inappropriate content, and that governance is crucial to success. In order to measure progress, a checklist has been developed to accompany the guidance. The checklist is primarily intended to make it easier for teams to apply the guidance to their work, but will also allow for comparison, monitoring and impact assessment over time.

Whilst it is implicit in this guidance that ‘female’ includes all girls/women, an intersectional approach must be applied. Please refer to specific guidance from the Global Diversity & Inclusion team and Employee Resources Groups (including Pearson Spectrum, Pearson ABLE, Pearson Prime, Generation Pearson, Pearson Latino Network, Pearson Parents, and Pearson Veterans) to ensure the products and services produced at Pearson are truly diverse and inclusive of all genders, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious and cultural beliefs and abilities.

Using this guidance

2 https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/articles-reports/2018/09/04/which-school-subjects-do-boys-and-girls-enjoy-more
5 https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/gender-stereotypes-in-early-childhood-a-literature-review
The way that people and characters are represented throughout our products and services (not only in text but also in illustrations, photographs, videos, audio etc.) is, arguably, the area in which we can have the most substantial impact on challenging gender stereotypes. Pearson’s aim is to create content that reflects the diversity of today’s world, including a balanced gender representation of people of diverse identities, abilities, ages, ethnicity, cultures and sexual orientation. While we talk about women and girls, and men and boys, in the guidance below, it is implicit that an intersectional view is considered.

‘Intersectionality’ is a word used to describe how we are all a mix of different identities which influence our experiences of the world. For example, a Black woman’s identities will impact her life differently from a white woman’s, or a Black man’s; and without care and attention Black women may be represented less frequently, or less favourably, in our work than white women. The same applies for a wide range of ‘intersecting’ identities.

- Ensure balance in the representation of genders, not only in number but in how they are portrayed.

Women and girls should be portrayed as equal and active participants (in terms of their voice, influence, authority and being visible in lead roles), in all aspects of life: at educational institutions; in the workplace; at home; in politics and civil society; in public life and in the community. Women and girls remain significantly under-represented in several critical areas, for example: STEM studies and careers; in research; in entrepreneurship; and in senior posts at all levels of education and business. Moreover, men and boys remain under-represented in fields such as: child and elder care; early education; the health sector; and unpaid work.

Where change is deemed necessary in order to encourage interest and participation from the minority gender, proactively include more examples of the other gender in positive role models and across all written content, illustrations, photos and accompanying media to challenge these stereotypes. For example, include proportionately more women than men as scientists, CEOs, doctors and programmers and proportionately more men than women working in nursing, primary teaching or caring for children in the home.

- Avoid unconscious bias in characteristics and behaviours ascribed to a gender.

For example, a woman being sensitive to other’s needs or a man being assertive. Gender stereotypes do not exist in isolation from one another. Stereotypes about women and men can reinforce each other – if men are strong and confident, women must be weak.
and passive; if women are emotional, men must be stoic; if boys are seen as risk-takers, girls are seen as compliant; if men and boys like fixing things, women and girls aren’t as good at doing so; if boys interrupt a teacher with an idea they are creative while a girl exhibiting the same behaviour is disruptive. In such examples, female stereotypes tend to be less valued by society and male stereotypes are generally considered aspirational, but the consequences can be harmful to all. Remove any suggestion that a characteristic or behaviour is unique to one gender and never carried out or displayed by another. Endeavour to use a mix of traditionally female or male characteristics and behaviours to all genders equally.

- **Where possible, aim to flip stereotypes and promote women and girls in traditionally masculine roles and vice versa.**
  Show girls dressing up as a firefighter/astronaut/mechanic, playing with trucks and winning the race first and boys watering plants, playing in a pretend kitchen and performing in a dance competition. Show women as the business owner, painting the house, wearing the lab coat and fixing the car and men taking the children to school, baking the birthday cake for colleagues, taking the meeting minutes and teaching the primary class. Take care to avoid content which conforms to role stereotypes and avoid the harmful suggestion that roles are associated with or appropriate to one gender only.

- **Look for and remove unconscious bias in fictitious graphs/tallies/data.**
  Examples include:
  - Graphs which list favourite subjects of male students as maths, science and IT and of female students as English, history and psychology
  - A tally of full-time salaries where the majority of men are paid higher than women or a chart about part-time workers which are all female
  - A tally of favourite toys in the classroom listing more boys playing with trucks, building rocket ships from Lego® and digging for dinosaur fossils in the sandpit and more girls playing with dolls, wearing princess costumes and assembling plastic baked goods
  - Or analysis of online shopping habits listing men as buying computing equipment, tickets to sporting events and DIY items while women are listed as buying clothing, cosmetics and home furnishings.
- **When using fact-based data or real statistics**, which indicate gender inequality, related content should highlight an awareness of this being an issue and any future proposals to address the issue (e.g., a graph showing the number of board members on FTSE 100 companies who are men could be accompanied by text highlighting the work most companies are now undertaking to close the gender pay gap).

- **When designing questions based on scenarios** involving female and male characters, be mindful of balance in terms of the context of the problem and in the number who get the answer right or wrong. Analysis of a competitor product endorsed by Edexcel and an audit during development of a Pearson product revealed that a gender bias existed where, although there weren’t more questions featuring men and boys than women and girls, the male was more likely to be shown to be correct in his answer than the female.

- **In classroom and team activities**, avoid making unnecessary distinctions between girls and boys that emphasise the importance of differences such as splitting the class into groups by gender, appearance or using pink to denote the girls and blue for the boys. Students can be split into groups by the first letter of their name or birth month to ensure mixed-gender groups rather than height, as an example, which may lead to more of one gender than another in a group.

- **When designing visuals**, ensure the colours chosen don’t stand as shorthand for gender (i.e., pink for girls, blue for boys). The aim, of course, is not to use solely neutral colours but to use bright, pastel and dark colours equally regardless of gender. Also avoid stereotypical clothing and accessories such as fairy wings for girls or a superhero cape for boys.
- **Imagery or other media/materials** should ensure that both women and girls and men and boys are illustrated as having agency and purpose (i.e. as equal and active participants), as whole beings (i.e. not as isolated body parts), looking healthy, and realistically portrayed. Objectification should be avoided at all times. In its broadest sense, objectification means treating someone as a commodity or object, without regard to their personality or dignity. This could include commentary on someone’s looks, attire, physique or way of speaking, for example commenting on or rating how someone looks while giving a presentation, rather than on what they actually say. Such messaging communicates to people as to what their place is in the world—to be an object or decoration for others to admire. Media research indicates that objectification has most typically occurred at the expense of women and girls, with similar treatment of men and boys being in the minority. If using data or imagery indicating gender inequality, related content should highlight an awareness that this is an issue and include a focus on showing females as multifaceted, autonomous beings. For example, depictions of sexist advertisements could be accompanied with text on campaigns such as #AskHerMore, which aims to refocus reporting on female achievements.

- **Make sure you have ‘female’ robots, dinosaurs, and animals, but don’t stereotype non-human characters.** Be alert to the removal of gender stereotyping where characters are animals, aliens, talking objects, etc. and apply the same guidelines to such characters as you would to humans. Avoid ascribing stereotypically feminine or masculine traits or appearances (e.g. long eyelashes to an animal to indicate they are female or a bow tie to indicate they are male). Instead, just depict them neutrally, and use pronouns and names to indicate that they are female. This avoids having, for example, some male dinosaurs, and some gender neutral ones – and no female ones.
Language

We communicate ideas about the world not only through language, but also through the images we choose to use. Inclusive language can be reinforced with inclusive visuals, as it is often the visual message that resonates with an audience. By portraying different aspects of diversity (e.g. age, ethnicity, disability, religious or other beliefs, sexual orientation etc.), we can ensure equal representation of all social groups. While we acknowledge that language should aim to be inclusive and reflect all members of society by acknowledging concepts such as age, ethnicity or nationality, the following guidelines focus on the gender dimension of language.

- **Balance the use of ‘she’ and ‘he’ throughout content to ensure equal representation of females and males in a product.**
  Avoid the use of masculine pronouns when referring to a person/group of people whose gender is unknown, mixed or to groups of people who are not actually male. Use ‘she and he’ to be inclusive, or use the plural ‘they’ to avoid using any gendered pronouns in these instances. Include gender-neutral names or no named character where relevant. Also consider the use of the singular ‘they’ as a pronoun where possible.

- **Vary the traditional order of words** (if the content does not require the conventional order): use females and males, women and men, her and his. This counters the implication that men and boys take priority over women and girls, and enlivens discourse by avoiding cliché.

- **Use parallel language when referring to people by sex.**
  Use ‘women’ not ‘girls’ for females over the age of 18 (unless the men are referred to as boys). Refer to young people as children, students, teenagers etc. rather than girls and boys too often so as not to reinforce the importance of their gender. ‘Ladies’ should be avoided (as it has connotations of women being delicate and passive), unless in an historical context and only then alongside ‘gentlemen’.

Parallel language should also be used for forms of address. Forms of address indicate attitudes about status and/or worth. Whenever men are referred to by title, use the appropriate title for female professionals (Ms, Dr, Professor) also, rather than their first names. (e.g. avoid: Dr Smith and Nurse Jane). If letters to unknown persons are used in content, gender-neutral greetings, e.g. ‘Dear Colleague’ or ‘Editor’ or ‘Professor’, etc. should be used instead of ‘Dear Sir’, ‘Gentlemen’, etc. If you are referring to a non-binary person, use Mx.
• **Use gender-neutral job titles** that make no assumption about the gender of a person who does a particular job or plays a particular role, e.g. ‘official’, ‘chair’ and ‘spokesperson’. Words like policeman, chairman, craftsman and handyman inaccurately identify and present a false image of people and their job and reinforce assumptions that women and men are restricted to certain roles and professions. Where possible, use terms like police officer, chairperson, artisan or maintenance worker.

• **Unless the gender of the subject is important to the meaning of a sentence, it should be omitted altogether.**

(There may be examples where a professional’s gender might be relevant, however, e.g. some women feel more comfortable seeing a female gynaecologist.)

• **Instead of using the generic term ‘man’, it is preferable to use gender neutral options** (implementation may depend on levelling/proficiency):
  - Humankind or humanity, not mankind
  - Synthetic or manufactured, not man-made
  - Maturity or adulthood, not manhood
  - Kinship or solidarity, not brotherhood
  - Staff or employees, not manpower
  - Sense of fair play, not sportsmanship or gamesmanship
• **Remove all sexist language and expressions that imply being feminine is negative.**
  - Don’t use ‘female’ before stereotypical male roles. Simply state the role: engineer, programmer, mechanic etc.
  - Use personable, not ladylike
  - Use entrepreneur, not mumpreneur
  - Use ‘He missed the ball’, not ‘He caught the ball like a girl’
  - Use ‘She is focussed on her career’, not career-woman

Don’t use the term ‘working mother’ or ‘stay-at-home mum’; if the focus is on the person having children, use ‘parent’, otherwise use employee, colleague, home-based employee etc. Also avoid language that is equally condescending towards males including ‘house-husband’ or ‘man flu’.

• **When referring to relationships, using partner or spouse may be preferable to using gendered terms** as it acknowledges a wider range of possibilities. If referring to a married heterosexual couple, ensure ‘wife and husband’ is used, not ‘man and wife’.

• **Choose adjectives carefully** as there are some words which – despite not having an explicit gender – are strongly associated with one gender, for example, women described as shrill, hysterical or frumpy. Also be aware of character traits society considers attractive in men and boys but negative in women and girls. Avoid using different adjectives to describe the same trait in men and women (e.g. an assertive man and a bossy woman). Endowing the opposite gender with these character traits should be avoided. Even using humour may trivialise gender issues (e.g. men shown as hysterical) and often reinforces the original stereotype.

• **In general, feminising and masculinising inanimate objects is considered outdated** (or poetic in English), and the practice is discouraged in official documents, newspapers and other formal contexts. Thus, just as we no longer use feminine pronouns for hurricanes or storms, avoid referring to neutral entities such as countries, computers or vehicles as female (e.g. Mother Earth, Mother Russia, ‘on her maiden voyage’, etc.). Note that this may be unavoidable in a historical or literary context (e.g USS Lady Washington or ‘The Witch of Endor’, etc.).
Referencing

As well as in our own content, references to texts, articles and papers, quotes, links to external content and the sources and examples teams choose to include can have a positive impact on the challenging of gender, and other, stereotyping.

- For English, Literature, MFL and ELT in particular, avoid the inclusion of gender biased texts, where possible, especially fairy tales, fables and myths. Do include texts which promote gender equality, especially those which flip stereotypes or retell traditional tales. Choose fiction references which portray characters as individuals. It is legitimate to include a text which features a character with negative characteristics, as long as that character is clearly drawn and unique and the implication that she or he is typical and representative of their entire gender is not suggested. Use caution if including gender segregated titles to illustrate counter-stereotypical role models as they are less likely to convey inclusive messaging.

- In products which cite research, papers and studies, ensure a balance from female and male scientists, academics, researchers, statisticians and other authorities in the field. Also aim to ensure balance in study samples where relevant (i.e. this isn’t possible in a study of prostate cancer in men aged over 50 but a study of lung cancer in people aged over 50 could be equally relevant to the context of the content).

- In history titles, the focus has tended to be on contributions made by important men, while the contributions of important women are more rarely or briefly presented. The reason for this is not that women have made less significant contributions to history, but because women’s contributions tended to be less visible, women have often been subjugated in societies at various points in history, their contribution to public life has been unfairly limited and can be more difficult to find or forgotten. It may be more challenging when including female leaders of countries, revolutions, scientists, Nobel prize winners etc. from previous centuries, but females do exist in these areas and should be included. Women must not be confined to the domestic sphere, though this an important area for inquiry: exploring how women organised the home, raised children in historical times, were involved in social history or textiles production etc. If historical information is sketchy, try to use more modern examples where women are represented. It may also be relevant to discuss and/or challenge the reasons why women have, and continue to be, underrepresented.

Sojourner Truth, born 1797, African-American abolitionist and women’s rights activist.
Links and further reading

- Pearson Global Editorial Policy
- Global Diversity & Inclusion Group
- The Fawcett Society
- United Nation guidelines on inclusive language
- European Institute for Gender Equality
- UNESCO gender equality resources for educators
- Our Watch: Challenging Gender Stereotypes in the Early Years

A note on terminology used in this document:

Pearson recognises that gender is a spectrum and that society is constantly renegotiating our understanding of gender across social, cultural, political, and commercial spheres. To keep pace with our evolving understanding of gender, the language used in the Gender Equality Guidelines and Checklist will be annually reviewed and updated. This is to ensure it reflects best practice as we continue to develop our understanding of gender. Any future changes to the document will be communicated to stakeholders and an electronic master copy will be maintained by WILL UK.