

## Report talk and rapport talk

Deborah Tannen's distinction of information and feelings is also described as **report** talk (of men) and **rapport** talk (of women). The differences can be summarized in a table:

Women	Men
Talk too much	Get more air time
Speak in private contexts	Speak in public
Build relations	Negotiate status/avoid failure
Overlap	Speak one at a time
Speak symmetrically	Speak asymmetrically

## Interruptions, overlapping and backchanneling

Deborah Tannen contrasts **interruptions** and **overlapping**. Interruption is not the same as merely making a sound while another is speaking. Such a sound can be supportive and affirming – which Tannen calls **cooperative overlap**, or it can be an attempt to take control of the conversation – an interruption or **competitive overlap**. This can be explained in terms of claiming and keeping turns – familiar enough ideas in analysing conversation. General supportive noises from a listener (“mm”, “aah” and so on) may be identified as **backchanneling** in some explanations of language and gender. (This is not a universal term among linguists.)

## High-involvement and high-considerateness

Professor Tannen describes two types of speaker as **high involvement** and **high considerateness** speakers. High involvement speakers are concerned to show enthusiastic support (even if this means simultaneous speech) while high considerateness speakers are, by definition, more concerned to be considerate of others. They choose not to impose on the conversation as a whole or on specific comments of another speaker.

Tannen suggests that high-involvement speakers are ready to be overlapped because they will

- yield to an intrusion on the conversation if they feel like it and
- put off responding or ignore it completely if they do not wish to give way.

In the British House of Commons, there is a formal procedure for this, whereby a speaker requests permission to take the turn (“Will you give way?”) and the speaker who has the floor will often do so (“I will give way”) – on the understanding that the intervention is temporary (a point of information or of order) and that when this contribution is made, the original speaker will have the floor again (that is, be allowed to stand and speak).

## **Gender themes in writing**

### **Sexism**

Language forms may preserve old attitudes that show men as superior (morally, spiritually, intellectually or absolutely) to women. Today this may cause offence, so we see these forms as suitable for change. But people may resist these changes if the new (politically correct) forms seem clumsy.

### **Non-sexist usage**

Personal pronouns and possessives after a noun may also show the implicit assumption that the male is the norm. Many organizations (almost all American universities) publish guidelines for non-sexist usage. These can be very detailed in their examples, but here is a short outline.

### **Summary of Guidelines for the non-sexist use of language**

When constructing examples and theories, remember to include those human activities, interests, and points of view which traditionally have been associated with females.

Eliminate the generic use of 'he' by:

- using plural nouns so that the corresponding third-person pronoun is gender-neutral "they"
- deleting 'he', 'his', and 'him' altogether
- substituting articles ('the', 'a', 'an') for 'his'; and 'who' for 'he'
- substituting 'one', 'we', or 'you'
- minimizing use of indefinite pronouns (e.g., 'everybody', 'someone')
- using the passive voice [use sparingly]
- substituting nouns for pronouns [use sparingly]

Eliminate the generic use of 'man':

- for 'man', substitute 'person'/'people', 'individual(s)', 'human(s)', 'human being(s)'
- for 'mankind', substitute 'humankind', 'humanity', 'the human race'
- for 'manhood', substitute 'adulthood', 'maturity'
- delete unnecessary references to generic 'man'

Eliminate sexism when addressing persons formally by:

- using ‘Ms’ instead of ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs.’, even when a woman’s marital status is known
- using a married woman’s first name instead of her husband’s (e.g., “Ms. Annabelle Lee” not “Mrs. Herman Lee”)
- using the corresponding title for females (‘Ms.’, ‘Dr.’, ‘Prof.’) whenever a title is appropriate for males
- using ‘Dear Colleague’ or ‘Editor’ or ‘Professor’, and so on in letters to unknown persons (instead of ‘Dear Sir’, ‘Gentlemen’)

Eliminate sexual stereotyping of roles by:

- using the same term (which avoids the generic ‘man’) for both females and males (e.g., ‘department chair’ or ‘chairperson’), or by using the corresponding verb (e.g., ‘to chair’)
- not calling attention to irrelevancies (e.g., ‘lady lawyer’, ‘male nurse’)

**Task:** Look for examples of written texts that are more or less gender-specific, in electronic form – either you will have them like this already or you can scan from a printed version. Revise them to comply with the guidelines above, using software that allows you to show or record the changes you have made.