Using Gender-neutral Pronouns in Academic Writing
From the Lake Forest College Writing Center

Show students the five strategies below to help them become gender inclusive writers. Example sentence with gender bias: A congressman must listen to his supporters.

1) Avoid gendered suffixes, such as “-man,” e.g. “congressman” v. “representative.”
   A representative must listen to supporters.

2) Use a plural form. Instead of “his supporters”:
   Representatives must listen to supporters.

3) Omit pronouns. Instead of “his or her supporters”:
   Representatives must listen to supporters.

4) Use an article and/or modifier instead of a pronoun. “The,” “who live in that state,” and “resident” replace “his”:
   A representative must listen to the supporters who live in that state.
   Or: A representative must listen to resident supporters.

5) Use “one” and “his or her” sparingly; avoid “s/he.”
   One must listen to one’s supporters.
   Or: A representative must listen to his or her supporters.

“They” may be accepted informally as a singular pronoun; however, it is not currently accepted as formal, academic style. In the meantime, students should try to use one of the five strategies above or work with professors individually when in doubt.

For more examples of and strategies for how to avoid gendered pronouns or use them correctly when they are appropriate, direct students to the following:

1) Section 5.225 “Nine Techniques for achieving gender neutrality” on the Chicago Manual of Style Online webpage:
   http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/ch05/ch05_sec225.html?sessionId=c5281ad6-1880-485f-874c-95a8fc424ceb

2) The “Gender-Inclusive Language” handout on The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill webpage: http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/gender-inclusive-language/
   *See the end of this handout for a helpful “Checklist for gender-related revisions.”

3) The APA blog entry “The Use of Singular ‘They’ in APA Style”: