



# Action Potential #1

## Gender Bias in Letters of Recommendation

Research has shown that letters of recommendation for women are on average shorter, contain fainter praise, more doubt-raisers, and more “grindstone” adjectives (e.g. hard-working).<sup>1</sup> Doubt-raisers, in turn, have been found to influence how applicants are evaluated.<sup>2</sup>

The resources below can help you ensure the letters you write reflect your intentions and reduce unintentional gender bias.

### Selected resources:

[Avoiding gender bias in reference writing](#) (handout)  
University of Arizona

[Gender bias calculator – English](#) (check how many words are female- versus male-associated)  
GitHub and Tom Forth, Head of Data, Open Data Institute Leeds

[Gender bias calculator – German](#)  
Projektteam FührMINT, Technische Universität München (TUM)

### Recommended reading:

1. Trix, F. and C. Psenka. Exploring the color of glass: letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty. *Discourse & Society* 14(2): 191–220 (2003)
2. Madera, J., Hebl, M., Dial, H., Martin, R. and Valian, V. Raising Doubt in Letters of Recommendation for Academia: Gender Differences and Their Impact. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 34: 287-303 (2019)

**Contact:** kimberly.mason@charite.de