

Gender Pronouns



What are pronouns?

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (I or you) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this). Gender pronouns (he/she/they/ze, etc.) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

Examples of the different pronouns and how to use them

The most common gender-neutral pronoun used by genderqueer and gender nonconforming people is “they/them/their,” but that doesn’t mean it’s the only option. Some people choose to use the gender-neutral pronouns “ze/hir/hirs” (pronounced “zee/here/heres”) or “ey/em/eir” (pronounced “ay/em/airs”), among others. Moreover, Ze/Per/Hir/They are pronouns used in the trans community instead of “he/she” or “him/her.” These pronouns offer inclusion and accuracy for someone who doesn’t identify by the male/female gender classifications. It is important to note that not all trans people use these pronouns; many use “he” or “she.”

For example:

Hir: (here) A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of “her” and “him”

Sie or Ze: (see or zee) A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of “she” and “he”

Ve: (vee) A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of “she” and “he”

The following table lists examples of different pronouns:

(f)ae	(f)aer	(f)aer	(f)aers	(f)aerself
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vis	verself
xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself
ze/zie	hir	hir	hirs	hirself

Pronouns - A How To Guide

Subject: _____ laughed at the notion of a gender binary.

Object: They tried to convince _____ that asexuality does not exist.

Possessive: _____ favorite color is unknown.

Possessive Pronoun: The Pronoun card is _____.

Reflexive: _____ think(s) highly of _____.

In addition, there are gender-neutral options for using Ms., Mrs. and Mr. If you need to refer to someone who prefers gender-neutral pronouns in a formal context, you can use the gender-neutral honorific “Mx.”

Why are pronouns important?

A gender neutral or gender inclusive pronoun is a pronoun which does not associate a gender with the individual who is being discussed.

Some languages, such as English, do not have a gender neutral or third gender pronoun available, and this has been criticized, since in many instances, writers, speakers, etc. use “he/his” when referring to a generic individual in the third person. Also, the dichotomy of “he and she” in English does not leave room for other gender identities, which is a source of frustration to the transgender and gender queer communities.

People who are limited by languages which do not include gender neutral pronouns have attempted to create them, in the interest of greater equality. You can't always know what someone's pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.

When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (often all of the above.) It is a privilege to not have to worry about which pronoun someone is going to use for you based on how they perceive your gender. If you have this privilege, yet fail to respect someone else's gender identity, it is not only disrespectful and hurtful, but also oppressive.

References

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Tips/Best Practices for pronoun use/allyship

- Make a habit of introducing yourself with your pronouns, not just in LGBTQIA-specific situations. This makes sharing pronouns routine, instead of singling out certain people or communities.
- You can never make any assumptions about what pronoun someone uses based off of their appearance. There's no such thing as "looking like" a he, a she or a they. The only way you can know what pronoun someone prefers is by asking them.

Here are some respectful ways to ask someone their pronouns

- "What pronouns do you use?"
- "May I ask what pronouns you use?"
- "When I refer to you, what pronouns should I use?"
- "Are you comfortable sharing your pronouns?"

(to make sure we are not pressuring people to "out" themselves)



- Try to avoid using the phrases "preferred pronouns" or "preferred name" as these suggest an element of flexibility or that someone's identity is less than valid. Someone's name and pronouns are not suggestions and are not preferred over something else. They are inherent to who we are.
- Keep in mind some people may use certain pronouns in some contexts and not in others due to a variety of factors, including safety. For example, a person may be openly transgender or trans at work but not at home with their family. Some people use different names and different pronouns depending on the context. It can be helpful to clarify in what situations someone uses certain pronouns. Remember it is up to each person how and when they choose to share part of their identity with others.
- At work or in other group meetings, make it a habit to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves and their pronouns if they feel comfortable. One can emphasize that sharing pronouns is an important part of respecting each person's identity and is part of creating an inclusive space.
- Adding pronouns to your email signature and business cards are an important way to show you understand the importance of pronouns.
- While we want to do our best to use someone's correct pronouns, mistakes can happen. If this does happen, it is best to apologize, say what pronoun you meant to use, and move on without dwelling on the mistake.
- Make sure to practice! You can practice using pronouns by telling simple stories to your partner or friends.