

# Understanding Pronouns and Inclusive Language

## What are pronouns?

“Any of a small set of words (such as I, she, he, you, it, we, ze, or they) in a language that are used as substitutes for nouns or noun phrases and whose referents are named or understood in the context” ([Merriam Webster Dictionary](#))

Pronouns are commonly used in everyday language, often without people realizing it. To respect someone's gender identity and avoid making assumptions, it's best to simply ask them for their pronouns. The way a person expresses themselves doesn't always align with their pronouns.

In some cases, using gender-neutral pronouns or terms like 'they,' 'you,' 'y'all,' or even referring to someone by their name can be helpful. Additionally, some individuals may prefer nontraditional gender-neutral pronouns outside of the traditional binary such as 'ze/zir/zirs' or 'xe/xem/xirs.' Another example of inclusive language is the use of the gender-neutral honorific 'Mx.'

Also, some individuals may say any pronouns or no pronouns, which if the case is no pronouns, you can just say their name!

By regularly asking for pronouns, you foster an inclusive and respectful communication practice. Remember you can always ask the question by first sharing yours.

## How to ask someone what their pronoun is?

Example 1: “Hello, my name is Stephanie, and my pronouns are she/her. What about yours?”

Example 2: “Hello, I'm new here, what pronouns do you use?”

Example 3: “Do you mind sharing your pronouns with me? Mine are he/they.”

## Why?

It can be harmful to the individual to use incorrect pronouns and actively choosing to ignore the pronouns is an oppressive notion. It's respectful and inclusive to use the pronouns they identify with. **Be an ally!**

**Examples of everyday use of pronoun:** *\*this list is not exhaustive for all pronouns\**

Here's an example of how people may use the common and inclusive (gender-neutral) pronoun **'they/they/theirs'** without thinking about it: "I saw someone left behind **their** textbook in class. I hope **they** come back to get it before it gets misplaced."

Another example: Person 1: "Did you see Ben **this** weekend?" Person 2: "Yeah! I saw **them** this past weekend!"

In this example, **'they'** is used to refer to someone without knowing their gender. Using **'they'** in this way is a helpful habit to adopt because it's more inclusive and avoids making assumptions about someone's gender. Many people naturally use "they" in conversation without even realizing it.

**How to use pronouns:** *Please note an individual may have a different pronoun not listed below*

**She/Her/Hers:**

Example: "Maria is my cousin. **She** was at my house earlier. That purse is **hers**."

Explanation: **'She'** is used when talking about Maria, and **'hers'** is used to show that the purse belongs to Maria.

**He/Him/His:**

Example: "Anthony is my friend. **He** loves video games. The game we're playing is actually **his**."

Explanation: **'He'** refers to Anthony, and **'his'** shows that video game belongs to him.

**They/Them/Theirs:**

Example: "Matthew is a great coworker. **They** work hard at our job every day. That laptop is **theirs**."

Explanation: **'They'** is used for Alex, and **'theirs'** shows possession (the notebook belongs to Alex). Note: **'They'** can be used to reflect a person who doesn't identify with traditional gender pronouns.

## **Ze/Zir/Zirs:**

Example: "Liz is a veterinarian. **Ze** has a passion for animals. That clinic is **zirs**."

Explanation: '**Ze**' is used instead of 'he' or 'she,' and '**zirs**' is the possessive form, indicating the dog belongs to Liz.

**Note:** Some individuals identify with multiple gender identities and may use pronouns like '**she/they**' or '**xe/they**,' or '**he/she**' for example. In such cases, usually, both sets of pronouns can be used interchangeably, but the first pronoun listed is the person's preference. It never hurts to ask the individual if they have any preference!

Here is a resource for more information on pronouns:

<https://www.gsrc.princeton.edu/understanding-pronoun-use>

Here is a resource about making a mistake with pronouns: <https://pronouns.org/mistakes>

- We all make mistakes—it's part of being human. If you recognize the mistake, correct it, apologize, and move forward. What matters most is minimizing harm and learning from it.

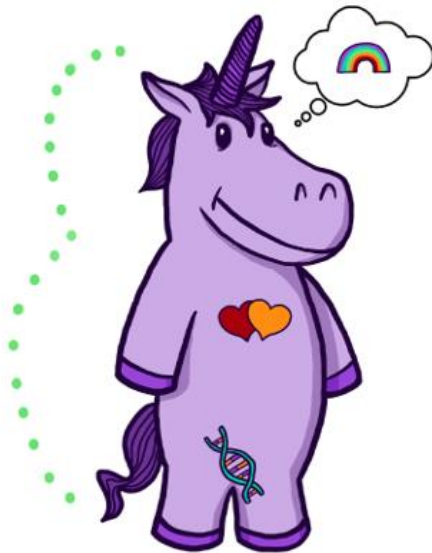
Here is a helpful resource for examples of inclusive language and rephrasing exclusive or stereotypical statements:

<https://inclusiviteasy.com/magazine/inclusive-language-examples/>

*See some helpful images on the pages below for further understanding and information.*

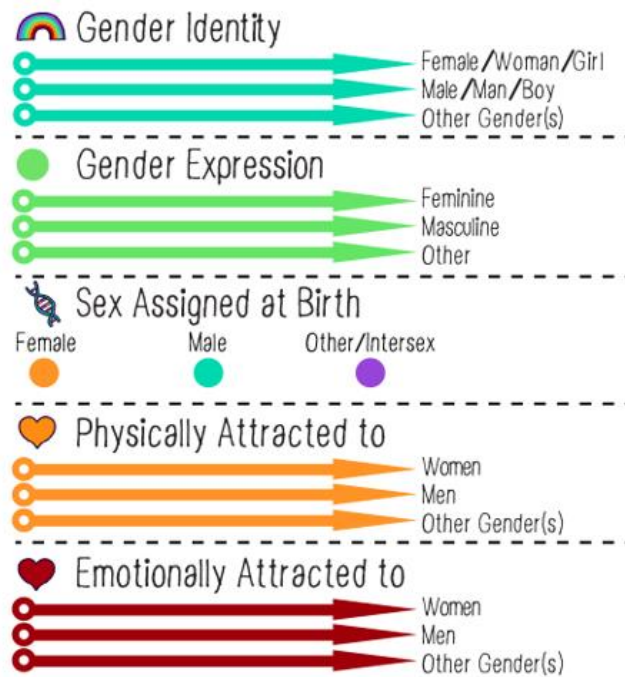
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# Gender Pronouns

Please note that these are not the only pronouns. There are an infinite number of pronouns as new ones emerge in our language. Always ask someone for their pronouns.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/ Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

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